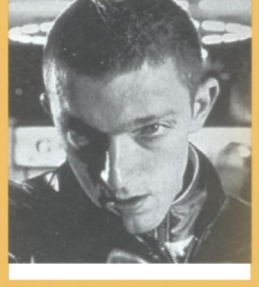

Film Quarterly

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Leni Riefenstahl—Mother of All Spectacles

November Days: Marcel Ophüls' Musical Comedy

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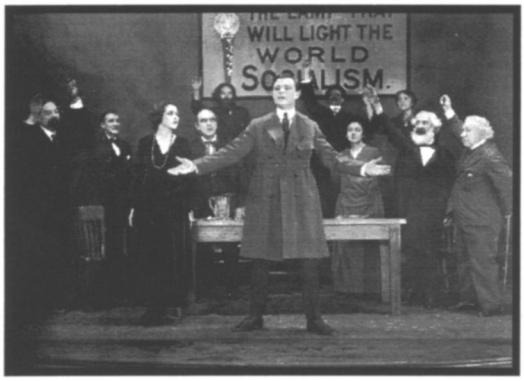

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Scott MacDonald

The City as the Country

THE NEW YORK CITY SYMPHONY FROM RUDY

During the decade or so after Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) established the nonfiction film as an aesthetic and commercial force, two apparently distinct, but closely related approaches to the use of cinema as a means of documenting reality were most attractive to filmmakers—and to some extent, to audiences as well. Some filmmakers dedicated themselves to the depiction of distant, "exotic" cultures. Flaherty collaborated with the Inuit on *Nanook* and later with the Samoan Islanders on *Moana* to dramatize aspects of their traditional ways of life. In *Grass* (1925) Merian C. Cooper and Ernest P. Schoedsack documented the migration of the Bakhtiari people from Turkey to Persia in search of grass for their herds; and later, in *Chang* (1927), they recorded the lives of the natives in the Siamese jungle. Of course, this fascination with the exotic was nothing new. The nineteenth century had produced a plethora of written and photographic records of "exotic" peoples now made accessible by the development of faster, easier, less expensive means of transportation;[1] and of course, from the very beginning of the commercial cinema, the Edison Studio and the Lumière Brothers recognized a potential market for motion pictures of exotic peoples.

The other major subject for early nonfiction filmmakers was the modern, mechanized city.[2] Indeed, the fascination of filmmakers with imagery of city life, evident in some of the earliest Edison and Lumière actualities and in Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* (1921, arguably the first American avant-garde film),[3] as well as in a series of European masterworks of the 1920s—Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* (*Nothing But the Hours*, 1926), Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, die Sinfonie einer Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*, 1927), and Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)—is the obverse of the contemporary fascination with exotic cultures. If Flaherty and Cooper/Schoedsack familiarized viewers with the exotic, the city films exoticized the familiar.

Of course, from our perspective, it is clear that the real subject of Flaherty's films and the Cooper/Schoedsack collaborations is the interface of modern industrialized society (as represented by the apparatus of cinema) and those pre-industrial ways of life "left behind" by the Industrial Revolution. In 1920s documentaries the romance of the exotic was (as usual) a function of its precariousness: in Flaherty, the traditional Inuit and Samoan ways of life had been sup-

BURCKHARDT TO SPIKE LEE

Rudy Burckhardt's *Under the Brooklyn Bridge* (1953)
Courtesy Rudy Burckhardt

planted by the time Flaherty arrived to film them; in *Grass* the nomadic life of the Bakhtiari seems to "modern" eyes as bizarre and impossible as the existence of a giant ape called Kong accepting sacrifices of young women on Skull Island—Cooper/Shoedsack's later fictional version of their travels in search of the exotic. If Flaherty pays the Inuit more respect (by effacing his process and focusing on Nanook and his family, by filming in-close so we are able to recognize individuals, by using an admiring intertitle narration) than Cooper and Schoedsack show the Bakhtiari, nevertheless both the Flaherty and the Cooper/Schoedsack films implicitly provide a final look at what the filmmakers assume would inevitably be lost as a result of the spread of the modern, mechanized technologies centered in the world's major cities.

Perhaps the most fundamental loss that surfaces in a comparison between the films of "exotic" peoples and of the modern city is the ability of early societies to roam the earth, or a substantial sector of it, while maintaining their traditional ways of life. The modern world is, increasingly, a place of precise and rigid boundaries between territories of all kinds, a kind of machine that produces a life of security and contentment (or the illusion of it) through the rigorous compartmentalization of experience. And the film frame is an index of this compartmentalization. If the Inuit, the Samoans, and the Bakhtiari seem to live without a consciousness of national borders, the people filmed by Strand/Sheeler, Cavalcanti, Ruttmann, and Vertov seem (for the most part) contented cogs in the machine of the city, which energizes the larger network of the Nation. If the 1920s' cinematic excursions to Northern Canada, the South Seas, and the Middle East take us away from national political boundaries, contemporaneous explorations of the great cities locate us in the heart of national territory and identity.

My focus here is not city films or city imagery in general, but what has come to be called the "city symphony": those films that provide a general sense of life in a specific metropolis, often by revealing characteristic dimensions of city life from the morning into the evening of a composite day. The general critical consensus is that Cavalcanti's *Nothing But the Hours*, Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*, and Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* remain the exemplary instances of the form, though Ruttmann's evocation of Berlin not only named the city symphony form, but provided a most typical instance of it.[4]

Ruttmann's calling his film a "symphony" is, of course, suggestive. Few forms encode the ideals of European thinking and cultural evolution more thoroughly than the symphony and the symphony orchestra. And for a filmmaker who wanted to honor Berlin as the quintessential modern European metropolis, the use of symphony structure as analogous to the structure of the city life may have been virtually inevitable. In an orchestra, dozens of musicians play instruments that have evolved over history to produce a multipartite, but unified and coherent performance within which the individualities of the contributing musicians are subsumed; in the city, the individual contributions of millions of people (working with technologies that have developed over centuries) are subsumed within the metropolis's mega-partite movement through the day, a movement that reveals several predictable highs and lows.[5] At the end of *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*, symbolic fireworks celebrate the conclusion of the metropolis's productive daily/weekly cycle and of a visual masterwork of independent cinema.[6]

Each of the 1920s city symphonies can be seen as representing not only a particular modern metropolis, but at least one filmmaker's vision of the nation this metropolis itself epitomizes; and the distinctions among these films reconfirm and/or polemicize national distinctions between the peoples they document. If *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City* reflects Germany's postwar hunger for social order,[7] *The Man with a Movie Camera* reflects the new Communist Russia's excitement about the Revolution and the advent of modern industrialization, and *Nothing But the Hours* epitomizes the poverty, the cynical realism, and the aesthetic freedom for which France in the twenties has become famous.

If the 1920s and 1930s produced no American city symphony as accomplished as those of Cavalcanti, Ruttmann, and Vertov, the period did see the formation of a history of attempts to represent New York. William Uricchio discusses an early triad of New York City films—Jay Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931), Irving Browning's *City of Contrasts* (1931), and Herman G. Weinberg's *Autumn Fire* (1933)—all of which are indebted to the European city symphonies.[8] Uricchio sees these films, correctly, as less interesting in their own right than as experiments: "Reworking continental developments through the American vernacular, these films continued the process of invigorating documentary with a new language of rhythm and evocation, while infusing avant-garde practice with a dose of reality and a capacity for social criticism."[9] More impressive than the early 1930s New York City films—though not a city symphony (it does not present a coherent vision of a specific city or a sense of city life during a composite day)—is the Ralph Steiner/Willard Van Dyke collaboration, *The City*, produced by the American Institute of Planners for the 1939 New York World's Fair. Van Dyke and Steiner directed and photographed different sections of the film. Van Dyke was in charge of the opening and closing sections (an introductory paean to New England village life and a long closing essay outlining the ideal modern city envisioned by the American Institute of Planners); Steiner, of the three central sections (one, depicting the effects of the Pittsburgh steel industry on the everyday lives of steelworkers; a second, on the oppressive nature of big city life, focusing on Manhattan; and the third, on traffic jams). The high quality cinematography throughout, Aaron Copland's fine score (his first for a film: "*The City* started me as a film composer"), and Steiner's wit, especially in the Manhattan and traffic jam sequences, made *The City* a popular and critical success. Like the more recent *Koyaanisqatsi* (1984), *The City* attracted a sizeable audience to a long film (forty-three minutes) that does not rely on plot and character.[10]

Since World War II, filmmakers working in New York have produced an impressive series of city symphonies. While many of these are reminiscent of the European masterworks, they often provide progressive, democratic revisions of the form as it evolved in Europe. Indeed, the focus of Rudy Burckhardt and of Weegee (Arthur Selig) on New York's multi-ethnicity and of Weegee, Francis Thompson, Marie Menken, and Hilary Harris on the opportunities the city provides for free artistic expression are at the same time noteworthy contributions to the city symphony form and premonitions of the greatest American city symphony: Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), a film that has not been recognized as a city symphony at all.

Rudy Burckhardt

It is unlikely that any American filmmaker has spent more time documenting New York City than Swiss-born Rudy Burckhardt, who arrived in New York in 1935 and has lived there regularly ever since. As soon as he arrived, Burckhardt began extensive photo-documentation of the city and by 1937 was showing his first New York City film imagery.[11] In a trilogy of short black-and-white films—*Up and Down the Waterfront* (1946), *The Climate of New York* (1948), and

Under the Brooklyn Bridge (1953)—the approach Burckhardt was to use in so many of his films about New York (and other locales) is already evident. Burckhardt has not seen his documentation of New York City as a polemic for national identity; indeed, his fascination with New York was, and has remained, that of a visitor taken with how the city looks and feels. Further, Burckhardt's films are involved less in attempting to capture the quintessential realities of the modern city than in observing particular aspects of New York that Burckhardt is repeatedly drawn to: particular architectural achievements—the Flatiron Building, the Empire State Building, Brooklyn Bridge—and areas where a wide variety of people congregate: Central Park and 14th Street, most frequently. These sites are presented as synecdochic representations of New York's immensity and social complexity.

If Burckhardt's New York films are less ambitious, and less pretentious, than the European city films of the 1920s, they nevertheless owe their overall structure to the city symphony form established by the Europeans. *Up and Down the Waterfront* begins with an early morning pan from the Manhattan end of the Brooklyn Bridge down to the busy market along the East River. Accompanied by piano music by Willie "the Lion" Smith, Burckhardt's images document trucks arriving with produce for the downtown markets; men unloading boxes and barrels; tugboats on the river; men hanging out, resting (presumably after the morning's work); kids playing; men outside and inside local bars after work, then leaving to go home; and finally, a man hosing down the street at the end of the day, followed by a pan of the bridge and lower Manhattan in the evening.

The Climate of New York is more elaborate than *Up and Down the Waterfront*: it divides into five distinct sections, each separated from the next by a moment of darkness, and each focusing on a particular aspect of the city. Except for the opening and closing sequences, each is preceded by a title taken from a poem by Edwin Denby. The opening section (two minutes, thirty-six seconds long) surveys the Lower Manhattan skyline and various intersections (in general, Burckhardt intersperses "catalogues" of particular dimensions of the city—building fronts, water towers on roofs, architectural details—with more extended panoramic shots), accompanied by piano music by William Flanagan, as are all sections of the film but one. The second section ("In Public, in Private," five minutes, twelve seconds) records on-the-street activities on a busy day: people come out of subways onto the street, walk, talk, interact, make phone calls . . . the emphasis is on the ethnic and personal variety of people engaged in similar activities. "Sunday in Astoria and Other Open Places" (three minutes, fifty-eight seconds) is a carefully choreographed sequence of open lots, comparatively empty streets, and the quiet Sunday activities of a Queens neighborhood—the Manhattan skyline is often visible in the distance. In "Evening" (part 1: one minute, twenty-two seconds), Burckhardt films the "canyons" of Manhattan streets, looking west in the dimming evening light (the imagery becomes increasingly abstract and graphically two-dimensional). This is followed by the film's first color sequence (part 2 of "Evening": three minutes, five seconds), of the lights of theater marquees and tavern signs in the Times Square area. "For a Dime Extending Peculiar Space" (three minutes, twenty-three seconds; this sequence uses sound recorded live) documents people entering and riding the subways. *The Climate of New York* ends with a fifty-one-second conclusion: three shots of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Lower Manhattan skyline.

Under the Brooklyn Bridge is structurally reminiscent of *Up and Down the Waterfront*, though it documents activities on the opposite end of the Bridge, beginning with a carefully designed sequence (reminiscent of the editing in Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*) of doorways and windows in and around the Brooklyn approach to the Bridge and ending with panoramic shots of the Bridge itself. A second sequence, which begins with a "Building Coming Down" sign, documents the demolition of a building near the Bridge, ending with several shots of falling walls (reminiscent of the falling-wall film presented by the Lumières at the Grand Café in December, 1896). The demolition sequence is followed by a sequence of the workers on lunch break, eating on the street and in a restaurant near the Bridge. A fourth sequence focuses on a group of young boys swimming in the East River; this is followed by a sequence of men and women leaving work and walking home. *Under the Brooklyn Bridge* concludes with several shots of empty streets in early evening and with images of the Bridge with the Lower Manhattan skyline in the background, filmed at dusk.[12]

Compared with the European city symphonies, the Burckhardt films seem, at least at first, to have no polemical edge. They seem strictly observational. And Burckhardt's editing decisions seem almost entirely involved with organizing his imagery so it can be enjoyed simply for itself. Of course, even the most apolitical film can accrue meaning as the years pass, by

offering a context for our contemporary sense of ourselves. As filmmaker Peter Hutton has noted in relation to the photographer Eugène Atget: "Atget recorded the details of the architecture, the atmosphere, the ambience of the streets of Paris in his time with loving care. At first, those images didn't seem to have any great value—they were familiar—but as time has gone on, they've become miniature museums."[13] Burckhardt's films are able to function this way in some measure because his imagery is *not* chosen or edited with a polemical intent. The sequence of the young boys swimming in the East River in *Under the Brooklyn Bridge*, for example, is not only a pleasant evocation of an aspect of city childhood, it has come to reveal what I suspect is a change in the way American boys relate to the movie camera. Most of the boys in the swimming sequence are nude, and they betray no particular consciousness of their naked bodies before the camera. It is difficult to imagine a group of 1990s boys so at ease with themselves or with the fact of being filmed under these circumstances. In the intervening half-century, Americans have become well aware of the power and potential personal danger of the motion picture camera and automatically suspicious of the motivations of those using it.

On another level, despite their lack of any overt polemical edge, Burckhardt's films do provide an implicit politic. In the early trilogy of New York city symphonies and in his many depictions of New York in more recent years—most impressively, perhaps, in *Doldrums* (1972) and *Zipper* (1987)—Burckhardt's love of New York seems a function of its size and of the diversity of people this size accommodates.[14] As a Swiss emigre who had seen the devastation brought on by the ideology of nationalism and by the German, Italian, and Japanese obsessions with ethnic purity and superiority, Burckhardt's sensibility was, and has remained, a particularly democratic form of live-and-let-live. While his films present many images of the city in long shot and panorama, images that sing the immensity of New York and the accomplishment of its architecture, equally characteristic is Burckhardt's documentation of people on the street, generally filmed from within the crowd, and often eye-to-eye. Burckhardt's filming stance toward those he records is one of equality, and if a 1990s documentary sensibility might complain about his intrusiveness and exploitation—some of those he films seem less than thrilled to be on-camera—Burckhardt joins his subjects, filming them in situations where he must feel, if not in danger, perfectly capable of being confronted if he goes too far: in working-class bars, for example, and at neighborhood events where his ethnicity must stand out. Burckhardt's films reveal him as a person who feels more at home in a variety of New York neighborhoods than most native-born Americans do. As a filmmaker, Burckhardt attempts to function as a Citizen of the World, both in his on-going activity of filming New York City—not as the quintessential focus of a particular national identity but as a nexus of internationality— and in other ways: for instance, in his combination of distinct locales, filmed during different eras, in the lovely anthology *Around the World in Thirty Years* (1983), which presents material shot in Manhattan in 1966; in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 1976; in Naples, Italy, in 1951; in Peru, in 1975; in Tokyo, in 1982; and in rural Maine, in 1981. Each of the seven sections of the film is distinct from the others, but the same sensibility, the same democratic ease with the day-to-day lives of individuals of various classes, ethnicities, and geographies is evident throughout.

Weegee's New York; N.Y., N.Y.; Go! Go! Go!; and *Organism*

While Rudy Burckhardt may be the most regular producer of the New York City films, during the decades following World War II other filmmakers also found New York City a compelling subject. Their films, like Burckhardt's, are much involved with the idea of individuality, but often in a quite different, and sometimes paradoxical, sense. Burckhardt's New York City films focus on the distinctiveness of the myriad diverse individuals who live together in the city. While he sees himself as one of these people, literally on the same level as the New Yorkers who pass by his camera, his own personality is generally effaced; at most, he is a generic on-the-street cameraman. By the 1950s and 1960s, many filmmakers were becoming more interested in *self*-expression than in documenting the individualities of others. Indeed, this growing interest in self-expression became the heart of what Jonas Mekas named the New American Cinema, a movement that became synonymous with the development of new, more self-consciously expressive visual styles.[15] Ironically, while this increasing commitment to self-expression resulted in a set of interesting New York City films and new cinematic experiences of the City, the filmmakers' self-involvement tends to create gaps that limit these visions in one of two ways: either the filmmakers are not able to integrate their personal experience of the City with the experiences of New York's

myriad citizens, or their fascination with technique tends to undermine ideas they mean to communicate.

Like Rudy Burckhardt, Weegee was a still photographer, and he was able to bring to much of the imagery included in *Weegee's New York* (1948) the clear-eyed observation and the fascination with individual peculiarity that made his New York street photography famous. However, while Burckhardt's trilogy of New York city symphonies reveals not only his sensitivity to the individual image, but his concern about the ways in which these motion photographs might be effectively organized into a larger structure, Weegee does not seem to have concerned himself with the issue of film editing—at least insofar as *Weegee's New York* is concerned. The opening credits of *Weegee's New York* provide clues to the unusual origin of the film: "Cinema 16 Presents Weegee's New York," the titles indicate, "A Travelogue with a HEART"/"Photographed by WEEGEE."

In the years before Mekas called the New American Cinema Group together, his "Sunday church," his "university" was the film society, Cinema 16, which was founded by Amos and Marcia Vogel in 1947 and until 1963 presented a very wide range of independent films—including, on two occasions (June 1948; October 1955) *Weegee's New York*—to large membership audiences.[16] As director of Cinema 16, Amos Vogel saw his mission as broadening American film awareness in every way possible. While monthly screenings were the mainstay of Cinema 16 throughout its existence, Vogel also became the first American distributor to specialize in avant-garde films; and in a few instances, Vogel worked with filmmakers to be sure particular films were completed and shown to public audiences. The most popular and influential of these films was *Weegee's New York.*

Weegee's photography was well known to the Cinema 16 membership, and Weegee himself was a member; so when Vogel discovered that Weegee had been recording film imagery, he was enthusiastic about presenting Weegee's motion pictures at Cinema 16.[17] As Vogel remembers, Weegee had no sense of how to edit the considerable body of motion picture imagery he had produced, and no interest in learning. Not to be denied the pleasure of presenting Weegee-as-filmmaker, Vogel edited the footage himself, supplied the opening credits as well as the titles of the two subsections of the finished film ("New York Fantasy" and "Coney Island"), and saw to the production of the music track that accompanies the film. The result is one of the most under-recognized independent films of the period (under-recognized *now*, I mean; the film was popular not only at Cinema 16 but within the network of film societies Cinema 16 inspired), and a work that simultaneously expresses Weegee's vision of New York City and Vogel's vision as a cultural missionary for independent cinema.

The "New York Fantasy" section of *Weegee's New York* (seven minutes, twenty-eight seconds) begins at dawn—"at five in the morning," an intertitle tells us—with a forty-second, color passage of New York City skyline seen from across the Hudson River, filmed from a mounted camera at successive moments during the early morning hours. This is followed by a stunning time-lapse shot of the Empire State Building at dawn. These introductory images are followed by a sequence of harbor scenes filmed with a lens that blurs the imagery and adds a red-yellow-blue rainbow to the sometimes time-lapsed, sometimes normal-motion shots (this and the next sequence are accompanied by symphonic music). The intertitle, "The Empire State Building," is followed by a two-minute, forty-second sequence of street scenes (some with the Empire State Building), filmed in a highly expressionistic manner, focusing on reflections and subtle qualities of light and texture, and then by a two-minute, thirty-second evocation of Times Square at night, filmed in gorgeous color and, at the end of the sequence, with time-lapse imagery of streets and intersections. The sequence concludes with an image of a man being shot out of a cannon, and with a closing "The End."

The longer (thirteen-minutes, twenty-three-seconds) "Coney Island" section begins after a six-second pause, with the intertitle, "A million people on the beach of a Sunday afternoon, is normal." The following sequences are Weegee at his witty and sometimes photographically invasive best. Color imagery of sunbathers, lovers, walkers, swimmers negotiating the crowded beach is accompanied by a series of popular songs that infuse the visual imagery with a variety of generally upbeat moods (Kenneth Anger's 1963 film, *Scorpio Rising*, is often credited as the first film to use a series of previously recorded popular songs as a sound track; *Weegee's New York* uses music in virtually the same way).[18] Like Burckhardt's films, the "Coney Island" section of *Weegee's New York* celebrates the wild diversity of individuals and ethnic heritages that have come together on the beach to enjoy themselves. And even more fully than the skinny-dipping sequence in *Under the Brooklyn Bridge*, Weegee's "Coney Island" reveals a population seemingly at ease with its bodies, even under the persistent gaze of the movie camera. It is as if Americans of the 1940s understood what most people of the

1990s have forgotten: that a holiday should not only be freedom from work, but from the necessity of maintaining socially constructed models of correct physical appearance. As economically and morally uptight as we imagine this generation to have been, Weegee reveals and celebrates a society that comes to life precisely when it is not being "productive"—a people who seem to have no interest at all in what others think of them.

"Coney Island" (and *Weegee's New York*), ends in the evening, as the beach empties and the setting sun creates gorgeous reflections on the lens and in the water—natural "fireworks" that provide an appropriate conclusion for Weegee's celebration of New York, first as a complex, phantasmagoric architectural space, and then as an immense, wildly diverse community in unself-conscious celebration of itself. Vogel's structuring of *Weegee's New York* is a celebration of a different sort: by combining Weegee's straightforward, observational documentation of the crowd on the Coney Island beach with the more self-expressive, worked imagery of a fantasy Manhattan, Vogel epitomized—and provided a memorable cine-monument for—his commitment as Cinema 16's director to two general modes of independent cinema: the documentary exploration of the physical world and the avant-garde expression of inner realities.

Probably the most widely seen New York City symphony of the post-war era was Francis Thompson's *N.Y., N.Y.* (1957) (also shown at Cinema 16, on January 21st, 1958, as part of the annual Creative Film Awards hosted by the film society). In *N.Y., N.Y.*, Thompson ignores individual New Yorkers entirely and instead provides visual interest by means of an ingenious and witty exploration of lenses and reflective surfaces, some of which may have been indebted to the early sections of *Weegee's New York*. Beginning typically with early morning evocations of buildings and bridges, Thompson reveals, as the film's subtitle indicates, "A Day in New York" ("New York" meaning Manhattan), beginning with an alarm clock waking a city dweller by shattering itself into a cubist image reminiscent of Juan Gris. The film moves chronologically through the day and evening, creating that set of emphases typical of city symphonies—the busy morning, lunch and the quiet moment afterward, the busy afternoon, the trip home from work, and nightlife—using a variety of often inventive visual techniques and accompanied by Gene Farrell's capable score, a pastiche of musics that, like the sound track of *Weegee's New York*, effectively suggests the city's varied moods.[19] At times, Thompson's visual effects are quite beautiful; at other times (as when he uses a highly reflective surface to bend imagery into surreal shapes reminiscent of the imagery in funhouse mirrors) witty and amusing.[20]

As enjoyable as it is to watch, however, *N.Y., N.Y.* is as detached from particular lives as Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*. Indeed, Thompson uses several lenses that shatter the action he records into a graphic space suggestive of a beehive. Basically, *N.Y., N.Y.* is less an attempt to analyze/critique the modern city than to express Thompson's personal excitement about living in New York and about being an independent filmmaker. That it remains perhaps the most broadly audience-accessible city symphony is a tribute to Thompson's success in providing a memorable sense of an emotion many of us have felt during our earliest trips to New York. Thompson expresses a sense of the City as sublime, romantic environment, full of color, upbeat energy, and architectural beauty.[21]

N.Y., N.Y. seems infused with a sense of New York's then-rising importance in art history: the film is full of high-spirited evocations of such landmarks as the Brooklyn Bridge and of apparent allusions to American artists, such as Charles Sheeler and Lionel Feininger, who have celebrated the modern American city. Most of all, Thompson's obvious pleasure in the effects he is able to produce with techniques far more overtly "experimental" than those in the commercial cinema of the time, and his implicit confidence in the audience's ability to enjoy these techniques, not only reflects his own enjoyment at being part of an exciting art scene, it also evokes our parents' excitement in taking us to New York to show us something far beyond our usual childhood environment. The New York City of *N.Y., N.Y.* renders viewers visual children. It may well be that the city also needs to be analyzed for its sociopolitical role in modern society, but from Thompson's point of view, we might just as well admit—and enjoy—the fact that, whatever its limitations and extravagances, New York is also, for many of us, a wonderful place to visit and to live.

One of the pivotal developments in the evolution of more personally self-expressive filmmaking during the 1960s was the increasing commitment on the part of filmmakers to "gestural camerawork," that is, to handheld camerawork that consciously incorporates the filmmaker's personal gestures into the imagery recorded (Stan Brakhage and Jonas Mekas are the best-known figures in this development). The primary influences here were probably Abstract Expressionist painting, with its unabashedly gestural brushwork, and related developments in jazz and pop music.

Marie Menken's combination of a handheld camera and a free-form approach to exposing film frames one at a time resulted in a particularly endearing city symphony: *Go! Go! Go!* (1964). (In the eleven-and-a-half-minute, silent, color film, the title is simply "Go!" though Menken interrupts our focus on this title, which is handwritten on reflective glass, by waving her arm—presumably an attempt to suggest the repetition of the word.)

Go! Go! Go! is the result of Menken's excursions in and around New York City from 1962 to 1964, and whether or not Menken conceived it as a city symphony, the form provided a loose structure within which she could present a wide range of observations. Menken begins with a walk across Brooklyn Bridge and around Lower Manhattan; the following sequences record New York harbor; the pedestrian and vehicular traffic at various intersections in and around office buildings; a body-building contest; a May Day celebration by women in fancy dresses; people arriving for a wedding; Willard Maas (Menken's husband) working at a typewriter on the porch of their apartment in Brooklyn Heights, the Lower Manhattan skyline visible behind him; a day at Coney Island (including beach scenes reminiscent of those in *Weegee's New York*); and more Manhattan street and New York harbor scenes. *Go! Go! Go!* concludes—in a typical city symphony manner—with shots of late afternoon across New York harbor, and with sunset.

The most obvious implication of Menken's title is spelled out in her own description of the film: "the busy man's engrossment in his busyness [sic] make up the major part of the film . . . ."[22] Another implication of the title relates to Menken's use of time-lapsing for nearly the entire film. This technique, of course, has the effect of speeding up whatever is filmed; with it, Menken creates a variety of kinetic effects. What may have been several hours of walking around downtown Manhattan is reduced to a few seconds, causing single-frame images of different people and places to pile up into "retinal collages";[23] her stunning time-lapse imagery of New York harbor causes the tug boats, ferries, and barges to scoot across the water like waterbugs (this particular effect may have been suggested by the time-lapsed ferries in *Weegee's New York*, which Menken probably saw at Cinema 16); and her time-lapsing of a college graduation ceremony sometimes creates effects reminiscent of *N.Y., N.Y.*, without the use of special lenses.

Menken's distinctive handheld camera and time-lapsing (along with her choice of composition) have the further effect of seeming to miniaturize big events and normally awesome aspects of city life. Her record of the body-building competition transforms the competitors' attempts to impress their audience into high-speed humor; in one instance Menken's camera points vertically down, reducing a construction site to an anthill; and her time-lapsing of an ocean liner making its way across the harbor suggests "The Little Engine That Could": Menken frames the ship so that it looks particularly small, next to the tiny waves in the foreground, and so that in one instance, it seems to be struggling to sail uphill (Menken interrupts the movement of the liner, repositioning it within her frame, so that she seems to control it).

By the time Menken made *Go! Go! Go!*, the awesome complexity of the modern city, documented in so many city symphonies (and in painting and photography), had come to seem so self-evident that Menken's playful, personal approach has the effect of re-inventing New York, and the city symphony form, by critiquing the very seriousness of the tradition she inherited. Ironically, while Menken may have felt she was conveying a serious message through *Go! Go! Go!*, the impact of her film has more to do with her stylistic playfulness and her implicit defiance of conventional seriousness about The City and Modern Man. For Menken, as for Thompson, the city is a wonderful location for personal cinematic exploration.

If time-lapse has come to seem the cliché of the city film, the recent popular fascination with time-lapse imagery (in recent years it's been used frequently in television commercials and music videos) came at the end of a period that saw a good bit of exploration of the device by independent filmmakers. *Go! Go! Go!* seems to have inspired Jonas Mekas's similar use of time-lapse in his lovely *Cassis* (1966), a portrait of a French port on the Mediterranean from just before dawn until just after sunset, as well as in his personal epic, *Walden* (1968).[24] And by the mid-1970s, a good many filmmakers were recognizing the possibilities of the device. For Hilary Harris, time-lapse seemed a particularly useful means for revealing the systematic structures of modern urban life; and in *Organism* (1975) he combined time-lapse photography of New York City with microphotography of the internal systems of the human body to provide a visual essay on the idea that the organization of the metropolis is a macrocosmic version of the internal systems that keep us alive.

In order to establish his general point of view, Harris opens *Organism* with two microphotographic images of the blood stream, and a live-action shot of people exiting a subway station. The opening titles are

then presented over a live-action street scene that subsequently accelerates into the first of the film's time-lapse passages. Periodically during *Organism*, Harris reconfirms the analogy between the movements of people and vehicles in and around the city and the bloodstream, by intercutting between the two—sometimes emphasizing the connection by using out-of-focus time-lapse imagery of city traffic at night which causes headlights to look like blood corpuscles. Harris's visual argument is contextualized and confirmed through his use of a sound track that interweaves various electronic sounds and musics, and two voices—one male, one female—presumably of biologists who describe various bodily processes. Harris organized the sound track so that the topics discussed by the biologists are particularly relevant to the time-lapse imagery their comments accompany. When the woman's voice explains how "food taken into the body is transformed into energy for activity," we see time-lapse material of trucks delivering food to the city; when the man says, "As the body sleeps, the unconscious mind displays great activity," we see views of the city as late afternoon turns into evening and night.

Like Menken, Harris attempts in at least one sequence to provide a more specific, moralistic message about urban life by juxtaposing the man's statement that "not all diseases are caused by external agents" with imagery of traffic jams—suggesting the health dangers of too great a concentration of pollution-creating vehicles in the city. But as in *Go! Go! Go!* (and as in a number of other films of city life that use extensive time-lapse shooting[25]) this message is overwhelmed by the frequently magical effects of time-lapsing itself. While we may understand that, from a health standpoint, traffic jams are a problem, time-lapsing generally charms the eye into an appreciation for the degree to which the systematic processes of the city *do* function, and Harris's success in developing the analogy between city and human body suggests that the urban systems are as natural and as inevitable as the bodily systems documented in the microphotography.

While time-lapsing has become a common means for imaging city life, the very nature of the device requires a transformation of the city symphony form. The fundamental structure of the daily cycle (dawn to dusk, or dawn to night) is co-opted, since time-lapsing can reduce a daily cycle to a few seconds. Of course, the daily cycle structure of the city symphony has always been a fiction, a convenient way of organizing extensive documentation of the city over months or years. Time-lapsing exposes this fiction—in *Organism*, transforming the cycles of dawn to dusk to dawn into visual cells within a larger cinematic organism. Harris's film is regularly punctuated by extended passages of time-lapse that record metropolitan vistas as seen from the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center over considerable portions of day and/or night. Indeed, at times, Harris ingeniously explores within time-lapsed vistas. For example, one thirty-seven-second time-lapse passage begins at night with the lights of planes landing at LaGuardia Airport, then zooms back so that the plane lights are merely one part of an extended vista of Manhattan, the East River, and Long Island; then, after dawn has transformed the scene, Harris zooms in on a factory on the far side of the river. Time-lapsing also transforms the city symphony by dramatically increasing the amount of activity that can be included within even a brief film. Though *Organism* is only twenty minutes long, like *Go! Go! Go!* it includes enough vistas of enough activities to seem much longer.

As late as 1975, Harris apparently felt that time-lapsing imagery was unusual and high-tech enough to justify his frequent use of science-fictionish electronic sounds as an accompaniment. But by the mid-1970s, Harris was one of many filmmakers interested in exploring time-lapse imagery, especially of city life. In Toronto, for example, Super-8mm filmmaker John Porter had begun to record activities in and around Toronto in dozens of films, which taken together, are a particularly extensive and inventive chronicle of city life. And by the 1980s, the device was having a considerable impact on the popular imagination: the extensive use of time-lapse material, especially of New York and Los Angeles, had much to do with *Koyaanisqatsi*'s becoming one of the most frequently programmed films on American college campuses, and one of the most widely popular nonnarrative films in the history of American film (this 35mm feature was directed by Godfrey Reggio, and photographed by Ron Fricke); and with the success of Ron Fricke's IMAX film, *Chronos* (1987).[26] And in *Water and Power* (1989), Pat O'Neill goes one step further still, by using the optical printer to interweave various layers of time-lapse imagery recorded in Los Angeles and in those rural areas that surround L.A. and, by being drained of their water, sustain it. The result is a critique of the city symphony convention that the urban can be separated from the rural: for O'Neill they are interlocking parts of the same process (*Water and Power* is the subject of a separate essay).[27]

New York has continued to inspire independent filmmakers. Notable among recent New York City films are Peter Hutton's New York portraits—*New York Portrait, Part I* (1976), *New York Portrait, Part II* (1980), *New York Portrait, Part III* (1990)—which I discuss elsewhere: meditatively paced, silent, often Lumière-esque evocations of New York City life; Ken Jacobs' *New York Ghetto Fishmarket 1903* (1992) and other "Nervous System" performances that explore turn-of-the-century film imagery of New York City, simultaneously reviving and transforming the original 35mm imagery[28]; and Stephen Low's IMAX 3-D film, *Across the Sea of Time* (1995). Low's film develops a flimsy Cold War plot about a Russian boy who jumps ship in New York harbour and searches for the brownstone where his grandfather had lived. To stay alive, the boy sells stereopticon images of New York City taken by his grandfather, which he has inherited along with his grandfather's letters. The particular tour of New York provided by the boy's wanderings is reminiscent of Browning's *City of Contrasts*. While the plot is predictable, *Across the Sea of Time* is fascinating because of Low's use of two forms of 3-D: the film intercuts between imagery of Manhattan a century ago in stereopticon 3-D and in 1995, in IMAX 3-D. Both forms of 3-D are compelling and contextualize each other: each seems fitting for the spectacular city of its time.

Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* as City Symphony

The power of Hollywood has so informed American thinking about cinema that the long, distinguished history of independent filmmaking has remained, at best, marginal to the awareness even of many of those who consider themselves sophisticated filmgoers; and further, the more distant from mainstream moviemaking a film or type of film is, the more thoroughly marginalized it tends to be. The converse of this pattern is that even those commercial films that do reveal considerable deviations from the Hollywood mainstream are seen almost exclusively within the context of conventional entertainment, and any connections to the more fully marginalized arenas of cinema are routinely overlooked. Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) is a case in point. Lee's feature is recognized as a provocative narrative entertainment with an unusual plot and a set of colorful characters, but the city-symphonic dimensions of the film have been ignored; and yet *Do the Right Thing* can be read as a city symphony, one that incorporates crucial elements of the form as it was developed in Europe by Ruttmann, Vertov, and Cavalcanti; expands the democratic vision implicit in Burckhardt's films; and closes the gaps between public and private, and between personal attitude and technique that limit the New York city symphonies just discussed.

From Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis

City streets in *Do the Right Thing*

The overall structure of *Do the Right Thing* is reminscent of the traditional city symphony. Like *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*, which begins with a prelude to the symphony of Berlin life (a dynamic visual orchestration of a train travelling the rails from the country into the city), *Do the Right Thing* begins with a prelude: a credit sequence accompanied and informed by Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." Lee's opening simultaneously evokes the conventional introductory movement *and* invests it with a new—if (for many viewers) confrontational and abrasive—energy that suggests both the achievements and the anger of African-America, as represented by Public Enemy and the dance movements of Rosie Perez. Following the prelude, the action of *Do the Right Thing*, like the action in Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City* and other more traditional city symphonies, begins early in the morning and moves chronologically through the day and evening, revealing the typical activities and moods pertinent to the various times of day (in the case of Lee's film, a Saturday). While Ruttmann's film ends with literal fireworks (that are echoed in various ways by other city symphonies—often in the "fireworks" of the sunset or of the lights of the city in evening), *Do the Right Thing* ends with social "fireworks" and the conflagration of Sal's Famous—a form of social rebellion Lee sees as being as inevitable and cyclical (given how modern American society functions) as the rhythms of the industrial workday in any modern metropolis (this is confirmed by Lee's closing dedication of the film to several families of young men murdered in racist outbursts).

What distinguishes *Do the Right Thing* most from *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*, of course, is Lee's development of a sizable set of colorful characters whose activities, interaction, and commentary create an entirely different cinematic world from the one Ruttmann creates. But this deviation from Ruttmann's sense of a city symphony does align Lee's film with Cavalcanti's *Nothing But the Hours*, which, at least compared to *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*, reflects a simultaneous commitment to city-symphonic structure and narrative and character. In *Nothing But the Hours*, the typical day in Paris includes the activities not only of masses of people going to work, laboring for their livelihood, and returning home, but of individuals. During Cavalcanti's review of a typical day, we get to know a young woman who delivers newspapers, and a young man (who seems to be unemployed) and his "girlfriend"; later, we realize she's a prostitute and he's her pimp. At the conclusion of *Nothing But the Hours*, they mug the papergirl and leave her for dead. There is also a metaphoric narrative, embodied in an old woman who staggers through the streets (is she Paris? Liberty?). These literal/symbolic narrative developments are woven through *Nothing But the Hours* and provide forms of information about the life of Paris that the more detached *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City* ignores.

Of course, *Do the Right Thing* goes much further than *Nothing But the Hours*: it is full of characters, many of whom are developed as distinct individuals in relatively limited amounts of screen time, and appear as motifs throughout Lee's feature.[29] Indeed, insofar as the characters are concerned, *Do the Right*

Thing is virtually an inversion of Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*. In Ruttmann's film, individuality is subsumed within the machine of the city; in Lee's film, individuality is virtually irrepressible: people find ways of distinguishing themselves, often by directly confronting those around them. The life of Lee's city is not accomplished by a suppression of individual personality; in *Do the Right Thing* the life of the city *is* the friendly and/or hostile interactions of particular citizens.

The fact that Lee's day in the life of the modern city takes place entirely on a single block, and a single block in the heart of the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, is simultaneously a democratic polemic—since all New Yorkers are citizens, equally, any block in any section of the City can be used to represent the whole—*and* a (privately-financed) form of affirmative action.[30] When they are depicted at all, the myriad citizens who live in predominantly African-American ghettos have usually been presented as types, and especially types of people whose lives are not to be celebrated in the commercial (or independent) cinema. Lee demonstrates the variety of these media-marginalized citizens, and suggests—as does Rudy Burckhardt—that in this very variety lies the energy of democracy. Even the uprising at the end of the day that destroys Sal's Famous in retaliation for the murder of Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn) evokes the early moments of the American Revolution, when British property was attacked in the name of preserving individual liberty. While Cavalcanti suggests that crime is not only an inevitable dimension of city life, but one of the things that renders city life exciting and romantic, Lee suggests that while violence is inevitable in the racist version of capitalist democracy, it is anything but romantic. Even if the destruction of Sal's Famous provides momentary self-respect for some citizens, it impoverishes the Bed-Stuy block, both literally and democratically: both Sal's (Danny Aiello) pizza and his Italian presence—and all the energy they catalyze on a typical day—are gone. And yet, while the fireworks that end the "typical day" in *Do the Right Thing* are destructive, it is clear from the scenes of denouement, and especially from the scene of Da Mayor (Ossie Davis) waking up in Mother Sister's (Ruby Dee) apartment, that what has happened is merely one more momentary setback for the neighborhood in a long history of setbacks. Despite the destruction, Lee is quite clear in *Do the Right Thing* that this one block of Bed-Stuy remains not only an exciting, colorful place to live, but a quintessentially American place as well.

A good many of those (especially those whites, I would guess) who have seen *Do the Right Thing* have chosen to see it as a fundamentally dangerous film in which Spike Lee urges African-Americans to retaliate against European-Americans. After all, the argument goes, Lee declares his loyalty to racist division and his approval of violence by having Mookie, the character *he* plays, begin the violent response to the police-murder of Radio Raheem by throwing a garbage can through Sal's window. The problem with this reading is that it ignores a fundamental dimension of *Do the Right Thing*: Lee's self-reflexivity as director—a dimension of the film that echoes Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*.

In Vertov's film we are not simply exploring Moscow, we are exploring the process of cinematically documenting the city.[31] The man we see setting up his camera and shooting is not Vertov, but his brother Mikhail Kaufman—though Kaufman does function as an alter ego for the director, who simultaneously demystifies the process of making motion pictures and creates a new form of cine-magic by intercutting between Kaufman shooting the imagery and the imagery we saw him shooting (the editing was done by Elizaveta Svilova, Vertov's wife, who also appears as the editor *in* the film). Of course, *The Man with a Movie Camera* is full of remarkable tricks. Some draw particular attention to the camera itself, which can film from positions not possible for the human body; others reveal the possibilities of superimposition during the editing process. Vertov's city symphony sings the magic and excitement of mechanical technologies and their potential for allowing the individual worker and the society of which he/she is a part to move into a new era.

Do the Right Thing is self-reflexive in different but related ways. Certainly, the audience for Spike Lee's films knows who Lee is (I would guess that Lee is the most broadly recognizable American film director since Alfred Hitchcock, in large measure because of his appearances, first, in a series of Nike ads with Michael Jordan that appeared in the late 1980s, and in more recent years on the sidelines at New York Knicks games). Indeed, even during the early stages of *Do the Right Thing*, when Lee's ideas for the film were taking shape, he was particularly conscious of his apparent impact as a recognizable personality within the fictions of his films:

> Something is happening. It's not of my will, but something is happening. I'm being singled out for my acting as much as for my

> writing and directing. It started with *She's Gotta Have It*. I never expected such a response to Mars Blackmon.
>
> I had a chance to forecast on my appeal as an actor at the five recruited screenings we've had to date for *School Daze*. The minute I appear on screen, the audience got excited. . . . I'm not saying I did the strongest acting in the film, but folks identified with me. I have something with people, and I think at this stage it would be a mistake not to take this into consideration as I write *Do the Right Thing*.[32]

In *Do the Right Thing*, the connection between Lee himself and Mookie is enforced in a variety of ways. Mookie wears a Brooklyn Dodger shirt with Jackie Robinson's No. 42; many viewers—especially those interested in sports—know of Lee's loyalty to Brooklyn and his admiration for the Dodgers and Robinson. And anyone familiar with Lee's career knows that Mookie's sister, Jade, is played by Joie Lee, Lee's sister; that Lee's father, Bill Lee, composed music for the film; and that Mookie's affection for Da Mayor and Mother Sister is a reflection of Lee's affection for Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee. However, the fact that Lee knows viewers will recognize that his *character* throws the garbage can through Sal's window to begin the destruction does not mean that Lee *as director* advocates destruction. Quite the contrary. In order to draw such a conclusion—as, apparently, many have—one must ignore the implications of the film's expressionist style.

Throughout *Do the Right Thing*, Lee uses an energetically expressionist style that owes a good bit to earlier commercial expressionists (Lee, in his *Journal*: "I want to use Chinese angles like the ones in *The Third Man*. They'll add an aura of uneasiness to the film"),[33] and that has much in common with the personally expressionist spirit of the New American Cinema. Indeed, from its opening moments, *Do the Right Thing* is punctuated by shots that draw attention to the camera, and to Lee as director. As Rosie Perez dances to "Fight the Power," the mise-en-scène within which she performs changes continually, drawing attention to Lee's fabrication of a continuous sequence from several different performances (implicitly the background provides an opening "montage" of locations around Brooklyn, seen here as stage backdrops, roughly similar to the typical American city symphony montage of buildings or vistas, though in this case more focused on neighborhood dwellings). The body of the film begins with such an extreme close-up of Mister Señor Love Daddy (Samuel L. Jackson) and his microphone that at first we're not sure what we're looking at. As the temperature rises through the morning, Lee demonstrates how hot it is by providing a sink-drain's-eye view of Tina (Perez) with her face immersed in cold water. Later, when Mookie goes into the kitchen in Tina's apartment to get some ice, we see Mookie reach into the freezer from *within* the freezer. When the kids open the hydrant to fight the heat of the day, and direct the stream of water, the water first flies directly at the camera, and when Radio Raheem presents his love/hate monologue to the camera, his fists and arms are distorted by their proximity to the lens. Of course, the most confrontational of such moments occurs when a series of characters hurl typical racist epithets at the camera/audience.

That Lee's expressionist flourishes make us particularly conscious of his direction of the film (and while such self-reflexive moments do appear in other Spike Lee films, *Do the Right Thing* uses them with particular frequency) contextualizes his presentation of Mookie. Just as Mikhail Kaufman functions as an alter ego for Vertov, Mookie is an alter ego for Lee. But while Kaufman and Vertov are two representatives of the *same* process, basically ideological mirror-images of each other, Lee and Mookie represent two very different possibilities. Though his pizza delivery job is enough to keep him alive (Mookie apparently lives rent-free with Jade), this job, as Jade tells him, can take him nowhere, especially since he works half-heartedly. However, while Mookie is going nowhere, his alter ego, Spike Lee, *is* in business, as a filmmaker. Indeed, he's in business in the same neighborhood, and *his* efforts are anything but half-hearted.

The distinction between Spike Lee/Mookie and Spike Lee/director reaches a crescendo when Mookie throws the garbage can through the window. The only response Mookie can think of to the murder of Radio Raheem and to Sal's siding with the police is violence: the destruction of Sal's Famous. Lee also is responding to a series of violent incidents (including incidents of police violence) that took place during the months when *Do the Right Thing* was germinating. His response, however, is not to drive a business out of the neighborhood, but to bring one in—a business that offers some of the kinds of opportunities Mookie doesn't have: "Sometimes on the set, while we're setting up for a shot, I look around and watch everyone working. I see all these young, talented Black artists and technicians and I feel just fine. It's a good feeling to be in a position to hire people who need jobs, people who deserve jobs. Of course, we can't hire everyone, but we're doing what we can."[34]

From St. Clair Bourne's
Making "Do the Right Thing" (1989)

Perhaps the dimension of Lee's self-reflexivity in *Do the Right Thing* that most clearly distinguishes the film from the European city symphonies, including Vertov's, is its particular thematic focus on ethnicity. Like Burckhardt (and to a lesser extent Weegee), Lee locates the vitality of the modern city in the nexus of ethnicity it creates, especially on the street; and like Burckhardt's camera, Lee's meets his characters eye-to-eye. But Lee goes beyond Burckhardt. Just as Lee himself demonstrates two different lives a particular kind of man might live, his film presents two different (and, perhaps, mutually exclusive) options for interethnic activity in New York City, and in the nation New York epitomizes. One option is that African-Americans, Caribbean-Americans, Asian-Americans, and European-Americans can continue to live alongside each other as they have, as communities that often define their own individual/group worth by negating the contributions and potential of other groups. Sal maintains his Italian-American identity by including only Italian-Americans on Sal's Famous "wall of fame"; Radio Raheem and Mister Señor Love Daddy maintain their African-American identity by playing only African-American music—Radio Raheem on his giant box, Mister Señor Love Daddy on his radio show. This option can lead to violence to the spirit, to fear, and to moments of large-scale physical violence to property, people, and community.

The alternative was/is demonstrated *by the production process of the film*, which required individuals with backgrounds even more varied than those of the characters in the film to find ways to collaborate, not just for one day, but for several of the hottest weeks of a New York summer, in a neighborhood in Bed-Stuy, on a film about America's most crucial and volatile issue.[35] To put this simply: Lee *dramatizes* the periodic destruction of modern city life in a film produced by means of a process that *demonstrates* an ethnically progressive alternative.[36]

In reading *Do the Right Thing* as a city symphony, I may have seemed to ignore too fully the fact that Lee's film is a fiction feature, not a documentary or an avant-garde film, and thus any attempt to locate it within the city symphony genre remains compromised. But *Do the Right Thing* is more than a fiction film, in at least two senses. First, and most important, *Do the Right Thing* is *both* a fiction feature *and* a document that proves that the progressive production process used to create the film was successful. Lee was not content simply to provide still another delineation of the problem of racism; for him, the filmmaker's obligation was to lead the way in the direction of a solution that requires both that African-Americans develop their own businesses and that European-Americans overcome their alienation and fear of African-American neighborhoods—and the racism that this alienation and fear are indices of.[37]

Second, from the beginning of the *Do the Right Thing* project, Lee made sure that the film would also have a more explicit connection with the history of documentary:

> During preproduction, Universal asked me to recommend a filmmaker to do the electronic press kit that the studio would use to promote the film. I recommended the veteran documentary filmmaker St. Clair Bourne. When I met with St. Clair to discuss the press kit, I

> asked him to consider directing a film about the making of *Do the Right Thing*. We were shooting in Bed-Stuy. We were taking over an entire city block for eight weeks. And we had hired the Fruit of Islam—Farrakhan's private security force—to patrol the set and to close two crack houses. Certainly, this needed to be documented. St. Clair got to work on the project immediately.[38]

The result was St. Clair Bourne's capably made, fifty-eight-minute documentation of the process of making Lee's film: *Making "Do the Right Thing."* Bourne's film extends the city-symphonic dimensions of *Do the Right Thing* not only by echoing dimensions of the form (Bourne interweaves several different kinds of time into *Making "Do the Right Thing,"* one of which is his review of the shooting of Lee's film as the action develops in *Do the Right Thing*: that is, from morning to evening). He reveals dimensions of city life we could only conjecture from Lee's film: while Lee dramatizes a typical day on a block in Bed-Stuy, for example, Bourne documents the unusual event of a sustained film shoot on a block in Bed-Stuy. Bourne's film develops nonfiction "characters" who do not appear in *Do the Right Thing*—the Fruit of Islam men who assist Lee in keeping order, for example, and a wide range of inhabitants of the block, including a woman crack addict who works for the production and struggles with her addiction, and various people who reveal their support for Lee's production and their reservations about its immediate and/or long-term benefits. Indeed, the range of personalities in Bourne's film is simultaneously clear evidence of the essential truth of Lee's depiction of the neighborhood and an alternative interpretation against which Lee's foci and exaggerations can be measured.

Bourne's film also confirms and extends the progressive implications of Lee's production process by recording conversations among the crew that relate to the issue of ethnicity. For example, during an informal conversation among several actors, Danny Aiello indicates that while he's called an "Italian-American," he feels no particular connection with Italy and thinks of himself as "American-Italian." Giancarlo Esposito, who is half black and half Italian and who plays Buggin' Out, the most aggressively black character in the film, counters by indicating that he *does* feel a connection with his Italian roots and considers himself "Italian-American." In other words, Bourne's film reveals that Lee's casting models the idea that people of diverse and complex ethnic heritages can work productively with each other in empathizing across ethnic lines. In the end, Bourne's film defines *Do the Right Thing* as an event not only in Lee's career and in the history of African-American cinema (in *Making "Do the Right Thing"* Lee mentions Oscar Micheaux as an inspiration, and an appearance by Melvin Van Peebles is accompanied by excerpts from *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* [1971]), but also in the life of New York City. One of the final images of the film is a new street sign for this block, now Do the Right Thing Avenue; and the film's final shot, which echoes the first, is a pan up from the street to the skyline of Manhattan in the distance. Finally, since New York's particular form of multi-ethnicity is a notable instance of a fundamental American reality and challenge, Bourne's and Lee's efforts speak to the American nationhood. As John Turturro, who plays the violence-prone Pino, says in *Making "Do the Right Thing,"* "This [*Do the Right Thing*] is not just a New York film; it's about any city in the country, or even a small town." Of course, multi-ethnicity is, increasingly, an essential reality of life in many of the world's cities; and so one might argue further that Lee's intense evocation of neighborhood life in Brooklyn is paradoxically a metaphor for, and a premonition of, the transnational dimension of urban life around the world.

In the end, the fact that *Do the Right Thing* does stretch the city symphony form is quite fitting: the film's mixing of genres paradoxically renders it as quintessentially American (and African-American) as the 1920s city symphonies now seem quintessentially *of* the nations where they were produced. America has restricted the social mobility of large groups of its citizens, including several of the groups represented in *Do the Right Thing*, but it has also regularly rewarded the defiance of social limitations (including cinematic conventions). *Do the Right Thing* remains Lee's most accomplished film, because of its director's courage and inventiveness both in facing a difficult social challenge in a commercial film, and in finding ways of representing this reality that simultaneously use and defy media conventions, historical categories, and production procedures for dealing with urban life.

■ Scott MacDonald's *A Critical Cinema 3: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* was published last fall by the University of California Press. He is currently writing *The Garden in the Machine*, a series of essays on the depiction of place in independent film and video.

Sources of Films

Manhatta; *Rien que les heures*; *Berlin: die Sinfonie einer Großstadt*; *The Man with a Movie Camera*; *A Bronx Morning*; *City of Contrasts*; *Autumn Fire*; *The City*; *N.Y., N.Y.*; *Evolution of a Skyscraper*, and *In the Street* are available from the Museum of Modern Art Circulating Film/Video Library, 11 West 53rd St., New York, NY 10019 (212-708-9530); Rudy Burckhardt's films, Menken's *Go! Go! Go!*, and Von Ziegesar's *Concern for the City* are available from Filmmakers' Cooperative, 175 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016 (212-889-3820); *Weegee's New York* from University of Minnesota: University Film and Video, 1313 Fifth St., S.E., Suite 108, Minneapolis, MN 55414 (800-857-8251); *Organism* from Kent State University: Audio-Video Services, Kent, OH 44242 (800-338-5718); John Porter's films from Porter, 11 Dunbar Road, Toronto, M4W 2X5, Canada (416-920-1031); *Water and Power* from Canyon Cinema, 2325 Third St., Suite 338, San Francisco, CA 94720; Ken Jacobs' Nervous System performances from Jacobs, 94 Chambers St., New York, NY 10007; *Do the Right Thing* from Swank (in New York, 800-876-3344; in Chicago, 800-876-3330; in St. Louis, 800-534-6300); *Making "Do the Right Thing"* from First Run/Icarus, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014 (212-727-1711).

Notes

1. For a recent overview of the nineteenth century's fascination with photographic documentation of "exotic" peoples, see Ellen Strain, "Exotic Bodies, Distant Landscapes: Touristic Viewing and Popularized Anthropology in the Nineteenth Century," *Wide Angle*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 70-100.
2. This fascination with imagery of the modern city is also evident well before the advent of cinema. When Robert Barker built the first large-scale panorama, initiating a mode of popular entertainment that has a good many relationships to cinema, his subject was the city of London as seen from the roof of the Albion sugar mills, the highest spot in the city between Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral. See Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), chapter 10; and Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular," *Wide Angle*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 34-69.
3. Jan-Christopher Horak's discussion of *Manhatta*—"Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*"—is included in Horak, ed., *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde 1919-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 267-286. A longer version of this discussion, including a shot-by-shot breakdown of the film, appeared as "Modernist Perspectives and Romantic Desire: *Manhatta*," in *Afterimage*, vol. 15, no. 4 (November 1987), pp. 8-15.

   A crucial and under-recognized figure in this development would appear to be Mikhail Kaufman, a colleague of Vertov in the Council of Three, Vertov's principle editor on the numbers of *Kinopravda* after *no.6*, and the director of *Moscow*, a 1926 film that reviews a day in the life of the Russian metropolis. See Annette Michelson's introduction to *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Vlada Petric argues against the possibility of *Moscow* being an influence, at least on Vertov: "Even a superficial comparison of the two films reveals that the structure of Vertov's film is light-years ahead of the conventional manner in which Kaufman depicts a city." See *Constructivism in Film* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 71. I have not seen *Moscow*.
4. Though *Berlin* is now credited to Ruttmann, he instigated neither the project nor the term "city symphony." According to Paul Rotha, Carl Mayer "conceived the idea of a City Symphony" when standing "amid the whirling traffic of the Ufa Palast am Zoo" in 1925: "He saw 'a melody of pictures' and began to write the treatment of *Berlin*." Rotha, "It's the Script," *World Film News*, vol. 3, no. 5 (September 1938), p. 205. And Ruttmann was not responsible for recording the footage itself—*Berlin* was shot by Karl Freund and several other cinematographers (Feimer Kuntze, Robert Baberske, László Schäfer), but he provided the film's final structure and attitude. See Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligary to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 182-189.

   In "Two Aspects of the City: Cavalcanti and Ruttmann," Jay Chapman distinguishes between Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City* and Cavalcanti's *Nothing But the Hours*—the former "a formal exercise, a reflection of the rhythm of the city"; the latter "an homage to the lower class people of the city"—in a manner with which I almost entirely agree and which informs some of what follows. In Lewis Jacobs, ed., *The Documentary Tradition* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971), pp. 37-42.
5. In his slide presentation for the premiere of *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City* on September 27, 1927, Ruttmann explained, "When I edited, the difficulty of rendering visible the symphonic curve before my eyes became apparent to me. Many of the most beautiful photographs had to be eliminated because the end result was not supposed to be a picture book but something like the structure of a complex machine which can be put into operation only when every part, even the smallest, is geared to the other part with exact precision." Quoted in Angelika Leitner and Uwe Nitschke, *The German Avant-Garde Film of the 1920s/Der Deutsche Avant-Garde Film der 20er Jahre* (Frankfurt: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1989), p. 82.
6. Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City* was the first German feature to have a complete orchestral score written for it, by Edmund Meisel, though the sound track is rarely heard now, for legal reasons.

7. Implicit within Ruttmann's overall structure is what appears to be a commitment to a unified, thoroughly organized, and controlled society. Indeed, in retrospect, Ruttmann's rigorously orchestrated composition and editing are prescient, in general, of what we have come to think of as Nazi organization, and in particular, of Leni Riefenstahl's aesthetic embodiment of and homage to Nazi principles in *Triumph of the Will* (1935), a film that echoes the city symphony form.

   This may be unfair to Ruttmann and *Berlin*—and to the complexity of his intentions for the film. Nevertheless, from a 1990s perspective, the relationship seems apparent. In *From Caligary to Hitler*, Siegfried Kracauer compares *Berlin* with Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*: while Vertov's film exudes revolutionary ardor, Ruttmann's is a "product of the paralysis" of authority, "a withdrawal from basic decisions into ambiguous neutrality," into what Carl Mayer complained was merely a "surface approach," or, as Kracauer puts it, a devotion to the formal qualities of objects rather than of meaning. See Kracauer, pp. 187, 184. This tendency to see individual human beings and the particulars of their lives as design elements is precisely what has come to seem so compelling and so frightening in *Triumph of the Will*.
8. William Uricchio, "The City Viewed: The Films of Leyda, Browning and Weinberg," in Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, pp. 287-314.
9. Uricchio, p. 309. I would argue that Uricchio is a bit overgenerous with all three of these films, and particularly with *City of Contrasts*.
10. In general, as a filmmaker, Steiner was more interested in depicting the natural world than in documenting city life. Indeed, his *H2O* was one of the first American films to explore natural scenery in a complex manner (the early years of cinema saw many depictions of the American landscape), and he returned to the subject of nature in a series of films made at the close of his filmmaking career, called "The Joy of Seeing." See my chapter, "Ralph Steiner: A Reintroduction," in Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, pp. 205-233.

    Copland credits working with Steiner with his involvement with film. See Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), pp. 288-291.
11. The best source for information about Burckhardt, who after sixty years of making films remains relatively obscure in independent film circles, is Rudy Burckhardt and Simon Pettet, *Talking Pictures: The Photography of Rudy Burckhardt* (Cambridge, MA: Zoland Books, 1994). Pettet's interview with Burckhardt combined with Burckhardt's own commentary provide something like a biography.
12. Burckhardt's imagery of New York City, and especially of monuments like the Flatiron and Brooklyn Bridge, was, no doubt, indebted to the many distinguished photographs of such monuments by a host of photographers, including Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler, Ralph Steiner, and Alfred Stieglitz. Indeed, Burckhardt himself was and has remained a photographer, as well as a cinematographer, of New York City.
13. Hutton in Scott MacDonald, "Interview with Peter Hutton," *The Independent*, vol. 19, no. 10 (December 1996), p. 33.
14. Other Burckhardt films which include substantial observation of New York City are *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1940), *What Mozart Saw on Mulberry Street* (1956), *Eastside Summer* (1959), *Square Times* (1967), *City Pasture* (1974), *Cerveza Bud* (1981), *All Major Credit Cards* (1982), *Around the World in Thirty Years* (1983), and *Central Park in the Dark* (1985).
15. I do not discuss *In the Street*, the 1952 collaboration of Helen Levitt, Janice Loeb, and James Agee, because its focus is not New York City in general—or even in particular: *In the Street* is a candid document of city street life and especially of children playing. It was filmed on Manhattan's Upper East Side with unobtrusive cameras, but as the film's opening text makes clear, the city spaces documented in the film are, for the filmmakers, representative of the economically disadvantaged areas of all big cities: "The streets of the poor quarters of great cities are, above all, a theater and a battleground. There, unaware and unnoticed, every human being is a poet, a masker, a warrior, a dancer: and in his innocent artistry he projects, against the turmoil of the street, an image of human existence. The attempt of this short film is to capture this image." From my vantage point in the 1990s, the somber passion of this introduction does not resonate with the imagery of the film: the children seem to be enjoying themselves like children anywhere, in any neighborhood; and what is perhaps most striking is what appears to be the easy interplay of various ethnic groups.

    The concluding shot of two old women walking in the dimming light of evening does evoke the city symphony form, and suggests that by the 1950s, the city symphony form was so well known that vestiges of it had come to be virtually inevitable in any film about city life.
16. For an overview of Cinema 16, see Scott MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society,* published by *Wide Angle* as a mega-issue in 1997. The development of the New American Cinema, and Mekas's role in it, has been widely documented. See, for example, Gregory Battcock, ed., *The New American Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1967); and David E. James, ed., *To Free the Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
17. I spoke with Vogel about Weegee and *Weegee's New York* in April 1996. Vogel had not spoken about his role in *Weegee's New York* because "Weegee didn't want it talked about." Vogel remembers an earlier, longer film being presented to an audience: "It was at least two hours; I remember two 1600-foot reels." Vogel edited what became *Weegee's New York* "at a very basic level," on the Cinema 16 film splicer, and showed the result to Weegee: "He said he was delighted."

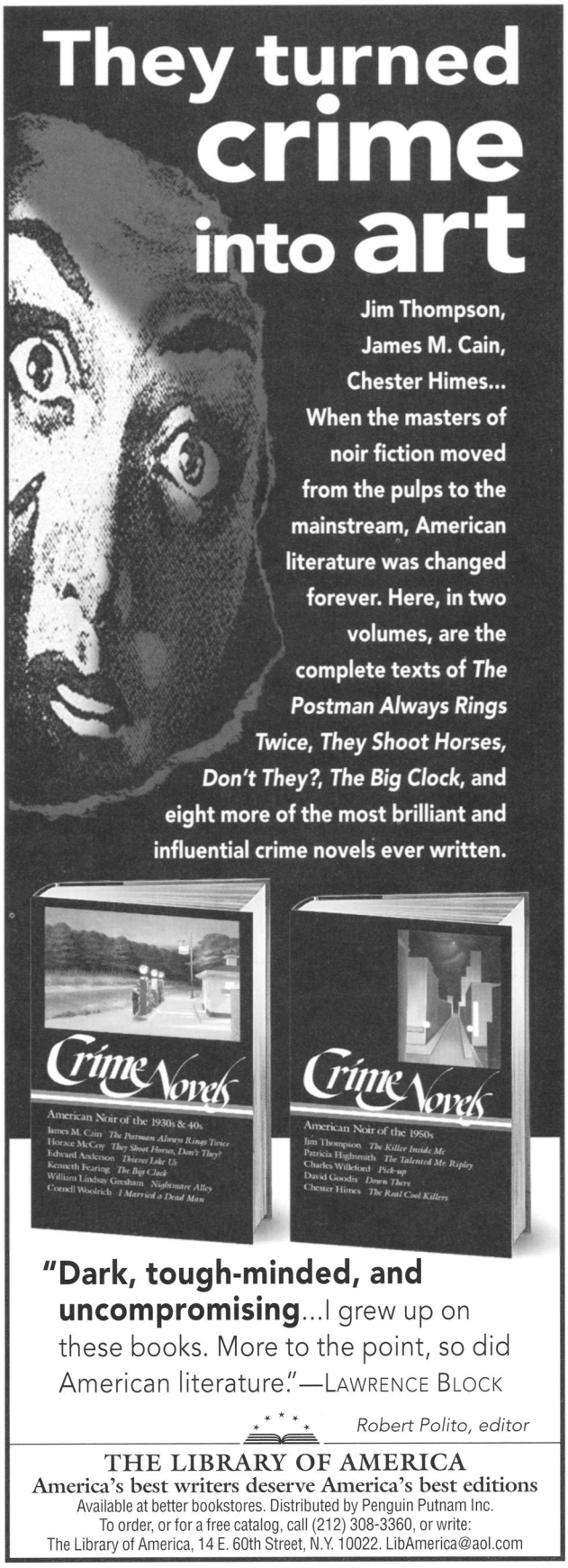
    Weegee did make other films. Indeed, his career as cinematographer/filmmaker is, as Jesse Lerner and David Serlin suggest, in need of reevaluation (see "Weegee and the Jewish Question," *Wide Angle*, vol. 19, no. 4 [October 1997], a special two-part issue on Los Angeles).
18. Vogel doesn't remember how this sound track got added to Weegee's film, though he may have done that as well. He thinks William Kenly, who sometimes provided music for Cinema 16 from his extensive record collection, may have been involved (Kenly has no memory this—letter from Kenly to the author, April 18, 1996). In any case, Vogel knows "it did not come from Weegee."

19. In "The Use of Sound in Francis Thompson's *N.Y., N.Y.*," Martin F. Norden describes Gene Farrell's score (and the additional sound effects), concluding that while *N.Y., N.Y.* is visually innovative, the sound track is thoroughly conventional, both in the types of music used and in their relationship to the visuals. In *Millennium*, nos. 10-11 (Fall/Winter 1981-82), pp. 219-222.

    In 1957, Larry Jordan shot *Visions of a City* (the film was not edited until 1978), which includes imagery of San Francisco filmed off a variety of distorting reflective surfaces—some of which is identical to imagery in *N.Y., N.Y.*
20. Mylar was widely used for (cheap) special effects in avant-garde films of later decades. Gunvor Nelson uses it in *Moon's Pool* (1972) and Robert Huot used it in many diary films. Now that Thompson's effects are more easily recognized for what they are, some of the original impact of *N.Y., N.Y.* has been lost—at least on this viewer.
21. Thompson's awareness of New York's architectural history is evident in his *Evolution of a Skyscraper* (1939), a silent, forty-minute documentary on the history of the skyscraper up through the 1930s, produced by the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Architecture and Design. The film is generally informative—and unusually inventive in its use of visual texts. *N.Y., N.Y.* also reveals Thompson's awareness of the history of the depiction of Manhattan in photography and paintings. His experimental compositions are sometimes particularly reminiscent of Charles Sheeler's paintings and photographs.
22. Marie Menken, in *Filmmakers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 7* (New York: New American Cinema Group, 1989), p. 370.
23. Robert Breer became well-known for the "retinal collages" produced by such films as *Recreation* (1956), *Jamestown Baloos* (1957), *Blazes* (1961), and *Fist Fight* (1964). Unlike Menken, Breer was not using time-lapse excursions into the world for these effects; he animated his films so that each successive frame in a series of frames presents the eye with an entirely different image. The images "pile-up" on viewers retinas at a rate of twenty-four per second.

    The use of time-lapse for a walk through Manhattan has both predecessors (e.g., Oskar Fischinger's *München-Berlin Wanderung* [1927] for which Fischinger walked from Munich to Berlin, single-framing people and landscapes all the way—see William Moritz's discussion of the film in "The Films of Oskar Fischinger," *Film Culture*, Nos. 58-60 [1974], pp. 129-130); and successors (e.g., the middle section of Hollis Frampton's *Surface Tension* [1968], which also begins with a walk across Brooklyn Bridge, and Andrew Noren's *The Lighted Field* [1987]).

    The ability of time-lapsing to condense experience leads Stan Brakhage to call *Go! Go! Go!* Menken's "epic masterpiece." Brakhage sees Menken as a master of poetic rhythm: in the little "'city symphony' that is 'Go! Go! Go!'" she manages "to show the entire trappings of the metropolis without the consequent despair of either Ruttmann's 'Berlin' or that which prevails in the more recent 'Koyaanisqatsi' . . ." See *Film at Wit's End* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 1989), pp. 40-41.
24. Mekas's *Walden* could easily be interpreted as a city film (indeed, I discuss it this way in a related essay: "The Country in the City: Central Park in Jonas Mekas's *Walden* and in William Greaves's *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* [1972]," published in *American Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Fall 1997), pp. 1-24. Mekas uses Central Park as his central metaphor for finding the rural (Lithuanian) homeland he left behind when he fled the Nazis during World War II, in the modern American city. Few filmmakers have been as devoted in recording the New York area as Mekas.
25. Peter von Ziegesar's *Concern for the City* is a frequently stunning film that like *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Go! Go! Go!*, and *Organism* uses time-lapse in very inventive ways (by controlling the rate and regularity with which frames are exposed and by carefully choosing compositions for time-lapse imagery) that virtually obscure whatever urges toward moralizing the filmmaker may have. Von Ziegesar may have "a concern for the city"—one that relates in particular to the convoy of (I assume) National Guard vehicles entering a neighborhood near the end of his film—but the impact of *Concern for the City*, despite its title, is in the time-lapse imagery's virtually inevitable celebration of movement.
26. Hilary Harris shot some of the New York City traffic shots used in *Koyaanisqatsi*, though apparently Reggio didn't see *Organism* until after his film was well underway. See Reggio's comments on Harris in Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 387.
27. See Scott MacDonald, "The City as Motion Picture: Notes on Some California City Films," *Wide Angle*, vol. 20, no. 1 (January 1998), a special two-part issue focusing on Los Angeles.
28. See my interviews with Peter Hutton and Ken Jacobs in *A Critical Cinema 3* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Jacobs' "Nervous System" is a projection device/process comprised of two interlocked analysis projectors (that can project films at a wide variety of speeds) and various propellors of his own design. With the device, Jacobs can superimpose images at various speeds and can tease from the original images new characters and (sometimes 3-D) experiences.
29. In his use of a wide range of distinctive characters, Lee is much closer to Rudy Burckhardt and Weegee than to any of the Europeans—though, of course, Burckhardt and Weegee don't use individual characters as motifs.
30. I wonder if *In the Street* (1952)—the widely seen (at Cinema 16 and elsewhere) documentation of New York street life, using a hidden camera—was a source for Lee. Like *Do the Right Thing*, *In the Street* uses a single residential city block to represent city life in general; and Lee's film seems to echo the earlier film, especially in his depiction of children at play.
31. See Vlada Petric's *Constructivism in Film* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) for a detailed analysis of *The Man with a Movie Camera*; and Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, translated by Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), for Vertov's own comments on the film.
32. Spike Lee in the book, *Do the Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint*, written with Lisa Jones (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 26.
33. Lee, p. 51. Radio Raheem's "love" and "hate" jewelry is an allusion to Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter*



(1955), another American expressionist film, in which the psychotic minister (Robert Mitchum) has "love" and "hate" tattooed on his hands.

34. Lee, p. 103.
35. The collaborators of *Do the Right Thing* include both the people from the neighborhood depicted and the varied group of actors and technicians who gathered in the neighborhood to shoot the film.
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37. As a result of his exploration of the American underclass, Danish artist Jacob Holdt concluded that the fear of African-American neighborhoods that seems so natural to European-Americans *is* racism, since it is virtually never based on any first-hand experiences in such neighborhoods, but merely on stereotype. See Holdt's *American Pictures* (Copenhagen: American Pictures Foundation, 1985), the book version of Holdt's epic slide show recounting his travels across America.
38. Lee, pp. 108-109.

(Cover picture from *N.Y., N.Y.* by permission of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.)

Correction

In ascertaining Kenneth Anger's date of birth for my article in *FQ* vol. 51, no. 1, "From the Bedroom to the Bijou—American Gay Sex Cinema," I unfortunately consulted a flawed source, *Anger—The Unauthorized Biography of Kenneth Anger* (1995), by Bill Landis. Anger was born in 1930, and made *Fireworks* in 1947, at the age of 17, not at the age of 20, as Landis erroneously contends in a book that offers up a number of other basic factual errors as well. Additionally, Kenneth chose his stage name at the age of four and has been known as Kenneth Anger ever since.

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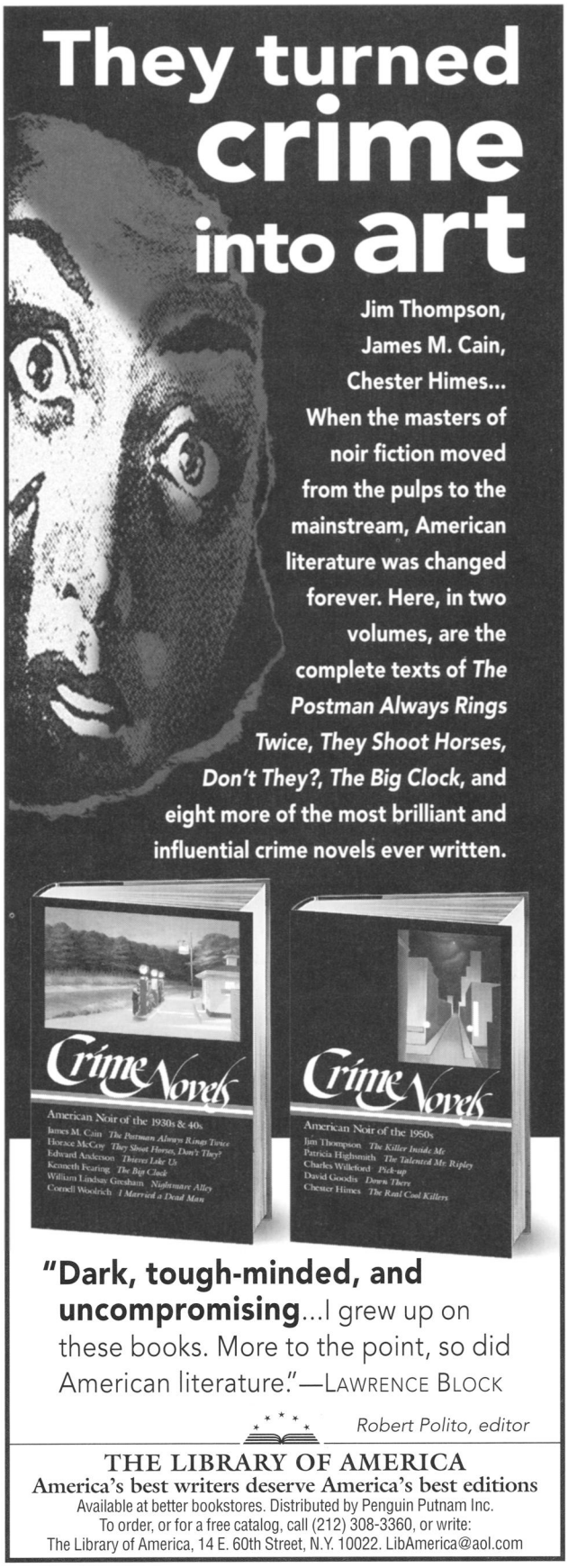

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Jack Stevenson
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Ruth Starkman

Mother of All Spectacles

Leni Riefenstahl, from *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, 1991

Ray Müller's *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*[1]

When Ray Müller, director of *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, attempts to film Riefenstahl walking and talking at the former UFA film studios in Babelsberg, Germany, she refuses and responds angrily, "Talk? As I'm walking? No! . . . I've never done that in my life . . . absolutely not . . . I'm not a ghost!" Riefenstahl is right; she has no need to prove her continued existence. This one-time favorite daughter of the Third Reich knows she's very much alive, well, and with us. She's no ghost. Indeed, the film proclaims her the still living "mother of documentary," and shows her waiting implacably for a historical restitution she hopes is yet to come. This strange state makes Riefenstahl the ultimate "undead" figure of postwar culture. Her lingering presence testifies not to our great progress from a much darker era, but rather to the fact that we remain, most terrifyingly, under her aegis.

The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl (1991), which consists of interviews with Riefenstahl, flashbacks, and film sequences, tells the story of Riefenstahl's remarkable life and her relationship to National Socialism. The documentary presents a subject who fascinates because, morbid as it may sound, she *is* still alive and remains "the last great surviving image-maker of the Nazis." However, Riefenstahl does more than simply survive. She presides as the "mother" of modern media, whose controversy remains her role in Nazi cultural politics and its legacy after the Second World War. In 1946 Riefenstahl testified in front of

postwar denazification tribunals, and was exonerated but judged a "sympathizer." There have been many other legal battles since, and she has won every time. But if the courts have found her innocent of crimes committed during World War II, her public has nevertheless been divided. For some, her works present the clearest example of Nazi aesthetics. For others, she has unfairly shouldered the blame for "the real culprits of the regime, most of whom, as far as film making goes, were quite happily reintegrated into the industry."[2] For still others, she is an artist who requires recuperation from her past association with the National Socialism.[3] Whether exonerated or excoriated by her postwar audience, Riefenstahl enjoyed a role in the Third Reich that was both unique and of her own making. Goebbels' diaries proclaim her womanly charms; Hitler admired her dancing in Arnold Fanck's *Der heilige Berg* (*The Holy Mountain* [1926]), and praised her own feature film, *Das blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light* [1932]). Riefenstahl once gave and still gives the impression of an individualist creative personality, and this ethos proves her greatest defense in front of Müller's camera.

Promoting herself as a dancer in the 1920s and thereby winning the attention of Max Reinhardt; sending pictures of herself to Fanck and capturing the role of female lead in his mountain films; inventing herself as Junta, the ill-fated mountain girl in *The Blue Light* and using this film as a testimony to her apolitical auteurism; and then attempting to mount a comeback as an African adventuress and photographer, Riefenstahl has made her 90 tenacious years into a series of spectacular media vehicles for herself. She entertained no different hopes for Müller's film, which began as her own idea. Over the last few decades, Riefenstahl had many offers to make a documentary about her life and work but consistently rejected them all. But when she learned that her old friend and former mountain-film costar, Luis Trenker, had died, she called a producer with whom Trenker had worked, and asked if he would be interested in making a film about her. He was interested. Ray Müller, however, a maker of *National Geographic*-style travel films and culture documentaries for German television, was not especially sanguine about associating himself with Riefenstahl. But when the producer told him that 18 filmmakers, including many of the big-name European directors such as Ophüls, had already declined the project, he accepted the offer. The documentary turned out to be three times its originally contracted length of 90 minutes; it was aired on French and British television before making the rounds at film festivals in Toronto and New York in 1992. In Germany it was shown on a small cable channel. That *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* circulated so widely but premièred with such a low profile in her native land attests to her continued controversy.[4] Her connection to Nazism renders her at once a pariah and a source of fascination, and Müller's comments on the experience of making the documentary suggest this much:

> Just being associated with the name of Riefenstahl is bad for your reputation. When rumors spread around that I was going to make the film, I was personally insulted by some people. . . . They called me "Nazi Mueller," things like that. Even within the TV station that was co-producing the film there was tremendous tension. Many people didn't want the project.[5]

Riefenstahl filming *Olympia*, from
The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl

Yet despite the opposition Müller encountered, he found he couldn't say enough about Riefenstahl. Asked why he made the film three hours long, Müller responds with a statement that reveals much about his own position on Riefenstahl as well as her recent source of fascination:

> We didn't want to [make a three-hour film]—the contracts were for ninety minutes—then we found such a wealth of material. Another thing is that people, mostly for commercial reasons, wanted to concentrate on the political stuff. But if you want to be fair to her . . . I mean, she had a creative life of seventy years, and to show only the eight years she worked under Hitler is not fair to the personality. Even if the other stuff may be less thrilling or less controversial, it's still what she did. Perhaps the film could be shortened twenty minutes, but not much more. I wouldn't cut it down to ninety minutes, that's not possible.[6]

While Müller understands his controversial subject's potential for creating a salable spectacle and hopes to counteract this with a more in-depth look at Riefenstahl's life and work, his comments suggest he sees no continuity in her career. That is, Müller implies that he views Riefenstahl's films made under the Third Reich in isolation from the rest of her oeuvre. This film is thus of two minds. Müller proves a most persistent interviewer who attempts to solicit a statement about the social responsibility of film-making—Riefenstahl apparently complained his questioning was worse than her denazification trial—and he devotes much reverent attention to her as an auteur whose art should be judged for its technical contributions to film-making. When Müller is asked how the experience of making this film changed him as a filmmaker, he responds:

> You can learn a lot from this enormous power she has. . . . It was tough for her to do this film because we asked a lot of her, like going up in a helicopter at her age. She never complained once. Even now, if you would say, "Come on, Leni, you have to get up at four in the morning, it's pouring rain, you have to stand on top of a mountain for three hours because the camera is going," she would do it if she could be convinced it was a good shot. Even at her age, she would do anything for a good shot. In that respect, she's a model for every filmmaker.[7]

This sense of awe about Riefenstahl as both a filmmaker and a charismatic personality at the age of 91 translates into the image on the screen. Consistently dazzling the audience with images of this old woman on top of mountains, under the sea, and in the studio, Müller presents Riefenstahl both "as a model for every filmmaker" and as an icon of vitality who inspires an image-conscious 1990s audience to identify with her.

The opening sequence establishes Riefenstahl as a fascinating "personality." It begins with a montage of shots of Riefenstahl scuba diving at the age of 90, clips of her Africa trips from the 1960s, and scenes from her films made under the Third Reich. It then cuts to a shot of Riefenstahl's house at night. The camera moves like a stalker thorough the bushes outside and pauses on a shadowy figure seen only through the blinds. The voice-over begins:

> We are in the presence of a legend with many faces: Loathed by many, admired deeply by others, her name is still taboo in Germany today. . . . Leni Riefenstahl, the last great surviving image-maker for the Nazis: A feminist pioneer, or a woman of evil?

These two options give us little choice. The suggestion that she might be a feminist pioneer sounds like the 1990s revisionism that attempts to recuperate Riefenstahl on the basis of her gender. There is nothing feminist about Riefenstahl or her work, and simply being a woman director does not qualify her for this designation. The suggestion that she's a woman of evil, meanwhile, is an ad hominem attack that allows Riefenstahl to stand in for the larger evils of the Third Reich. This latter position reduces the complexity of the relation of culture and cultural producers to politics with the rather crude assumption that culture has the powers to implement official policy and enact evil deeds. Müller states that his film will avoid such received positions and approach Riefenstahl "without preconceptions."

Having articulated his reservations about associating his name with a one-time Nazi director only to find himself fascinated by his subject, Müller also attempts to gain some critical distance. His filmic solution to the problem of representing Riefenstahl is to offer no solution in particular, but instead to vacillate in postures and approaches—sometimes critical, sometimes lurid, sometimes fawning, sometimes parodic. Part I begins as a flashback, with the aged filmmaker looking at glamorous promotion photos of herself. Riefenstahl comments that she experiences

the photos as she would looking at another person. The film proceeds to tell the story of her early years in German cinema. Parody frames Part II, which opens with a sequence of Riefenstahl's god-like Olympic humans, Greek statues, and mystically photographed landscapes. The film then cuts to a shot of the creator of this heroic vision on her way to the Olympic stadium. The camera swings behind Riefenstahl and shows her back-lit, larger than life, striding through the Grecian columns in a pink raincoat and demure matching handbag. The music swells and Riefenstahl finds herself alone in the stadium. Here, her aesthetics are made to seem corny and self-inflated. Elsewhere, in the darkened hallway at UFA, Riefenstahl appears in the same pink raincoat and handbag as she approaches another old haunt, but the tone is melancholy, showing her to be old, frail, and quite literally outside the mainstream of German film history. While this scene at Babelsberg is deflationary, inviting Riefenstahl back as history's loser to a place where her one-time rival Marlene Dietrich has been honored, Riefenstahl herself remains impervious to insult and holds herself triumphantly before Müller's camera.[8] Moreover, she appropriates the conceit of her outsiderness as her own. Riefenstahl would like to claim a certain modesty in having occupied only the smaller of UFA's studios for the production of Fanck's mountain films, and she would also have it that her art and person were estranged from the centralized Nazi film machine under Goebbels. Here, Müller reinforces these positions.

If parody offers little beyond the suggestion that Grecian fantasies have gone out of style with the Third Reich and if melancholy runs aground on Riefenstahl's own spurious account, Müller refrains from employing these modes in excess. For the most part, the documentary plays it straight and follows a linear chronology of Riefenstahl's life intercut with film clips and interviews which endeavor to expose the truth about its subject.[9] This effort at presenting Riefenstahl in a style of "objectivity," or as the voice-over claims, "without preconceptions," proves immediately problematic with a personality like Riefenstahl, whose entire life and sense of self are about drama and fictive diversions. Müller copes with this difference in documentary approaches by including marginal commentary and cut-outs. This footage, which appears between actual film sequences, thematizes the struggles between the two directors, and shows Riefenstahl wanting very much to direct this picture while her director appears often at a loss. Above all, these sequences depict a subject who knows exactly what the German title of the film, *Die Macht der Bilder*, suggests: the power of pictures.

The scene at UFA where Müller asks Riefenstahl to walk and talk in front of the camera is one such moment in his film. Another occurs during a discussion of *Sieg des Glaubens* (*Victory of Faith* [1933]), her nearly forgotten first documentary effort for the Nazis. Riefenstahl's attempt at filming the 1933 Nazi party congress in Nuremberg depicts the Nazis wandering somewhat aimlessly about. The voice-over comments, "The Nazis had not yet learned to march like Nazis. . . . Hitler and Riefenstahl were still trying to get it right." Both aesthetically and historically, the film is an embarrassment to her.

Riefenstahl objects when Müller refers to *Sieg des Glaubens* as her "film." "It's not even a proper film, it's just a few shots I put together . . . it has nothing to do with my technique," she insists. Standing in the empty stadium on the site of the 1934 rally, Müller pushes the point that she made not only one infamous documentary of the Nuremberg rallies, but *two*. She does not respond to his suggestion that she had more interest in official Nazi promotions than she's now willing to admit, but continues instead in her effort to deny the 1933 documentary's status as a film. When Müller persists, she objects angrily to the poor lighting, telling him she's glad to speak about this other film at length, "Aber bei diesem Scheißlicht doch nicht." ("But not in this bloody lighting"—the British translation of *Scheiß* as "bloody" sounding a bit tame to American ears.) As she grabs him by the arm and shakes him, telling Müller it's important that he understand the difference between the two films—one being a proper artistic effort in which she was able to employ her "technique" and the other not—Riefenstahl displays strength at once remarkable for a woman of her age and yet unsurprising given her determination to have history depicted to her liking. After swearing about the lighting, Riefenstahl gets to replay the scene. Shot this time in low, theatrical light at her home, she explains the reason for two documentaries in melodramatic terms. It was a struggle between Hitler and Goebbels, whose enmity she'd aroused after refusing his advances.

Riefenstahl's diversions to melodramatic narrative in no way contradict her interest in the material events that have shaped her life and work. Indeed, despite all her protestations to Müller about her lack of interest in politics, she also shows herself quite willing to engage in amateur political historiography. In a sequence shot at the Olympic stadium, the voice-over tells the audience that Riefenstahl and her old "cam-

Riefenstahl preparing *Olympia*, from *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*

paigners" are about to take a coffee break; the picture shows one of Müller's cameramen pausing to readjust his lens. Then the camera rolls again, this time framed in brackets so the audience knows the footage is not part of the official filming process. Seen sitting with Guzzi Lantschner and Walter Frentz, two of her old cameramen who helped film *Olympia*, Riefenstahl relates an anecdote in which Churchill was supposedly impressed by Hitler and initially wanted to emulate him. She tells them, "In 1935 Churchill said, 'I envy the Germans for their Führer,'. . . and then two years later he said, 'The German swine must be slaughtered.'" The story is vague, but its intent is clear: Riefenstahl depicts herself among the great political powers of the Second World War, purports to have known their personal political aspirations, reduces all political positions to questions of charismatic leadership, and then revises this bit of history to suggest Allied and Axis interests were initially the same. Riefenstahl's old friends nod dutifully. She goes on to marvel with Walter Frentz at his own proximity to the Nazi elite. Müller, meanwhile, has captured this discussion while on-the-prowl and off-the-record, and frames it as evidence of Riefenstahl's interest in politics which he's caught unbeknownst to her. As if to reinforce the sensation of having caught Riefenstahl talking politics, Müller includes a voice-over that says: "Riefenstahl refuses to discuss politics in public." This is a telling moment both for Riefenstahl and her director. While it shows that Riefenstahl never relinquished her admiration of the Nazis, the sequence also reminds the audience Riefenstahl really has nothing new to say and that this film itself can only provide a spectacle in which she attempts once more to restore her reputation. Müller thus finds himself in the reactive position of contesting her case.

The segment on *Triumph of the Will*, meanwhile, reveals the film's central ambivalence. On the one hand, like the "off-the-record" sequences, this part of the film hopes to expose the problems with Riefenstahl's self-understanding as an artist. It shows Riefenstahl disparaging *Triumph of the Will* for all the misfortune it has brought her while she also attempts to recover it as part of her artistic oeuvre. She even goes so far as to claim this documentary of the 1934 rallies, which has been called "one of the few aesthetic monuments of German fascism that has attracted serious critical scrutiny,"[10] is unimportant in its contents. Whether she was filming fruit or vegetables or Nazis, it was all the same to her, she tells Müller. Sitting at her cutting table, glowing with unconcealed artistic pride as she views a copy of *Triumph of the Will*, Riefenstahl calls attention to her spectacular editing. She shows Müller a sequence with Nazi troops descending the stadium in step with the music—this is the same clip he uses in the opening sequence—and presents it as an example of her precise formalism and filmic technique. While this segment displays the absurdity of Riefenstahl's disclaimers about the contents of *Triumph of the Will*, it

also adopts Riefenstahl's vocabulary and thereby undermines its own critique. Asking the rhetorical question of whether Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* was a "triumph of her own will or a pact with the devil," the documentary offers only two choices: Is *Triumph of the Will*, which the voice-over dubiously names "the best propaganda film of all time," an unfortunate commission which nevertheless inspires film-making awe, or is it the result of a naively mistaken alliance with a demonic force. In either case, Riefenstahl comes off as an artist whose "tragic" flaw lies in her "talent"—Müller even says "her talent is her tragedy"—and in the bad company she kept.[11]

The film's attempt to recover Riefenstahl as an artist is most clear in Müller's extended and sympathetic sequence on *The Blue Light*. With clips, interviews, and lavish attention to her directorial techniques, the sequence on *The Blue Light* presents an image of Riefenstahl as a director who seems to have produced genuinely innovative films apart from her explicit efforts for the Third Reich. But *The Blue Light*'s production history complicates such an account. Riefenstahl, who collaborated on her 1932 feature with a Jewish leftist intellectual scriptwriter, Béla Balázs, excised his name from the credits upon its 1938 rerelease after the success of *Olympia*.[12] For a 1990s audience, she appears to have reinstated Balázs and even recruits him as a political alibi. Shown leafing through the original film script, which she proffers as both an authenticating document of her early artistic efforts and proof of her political openness, Riefenstahl refers to her work with Balázs as a "wonderful collaboration."

But it is not merely her treatment of Balázs that has raised questions about Riefenstahl's film. If her first feature has appeared to some—including Müller—as an early masterpiece worthy of praise for its pioneering techniques,[13] it has also been denounced as an aesthetic precursor to Nazism. In his *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Siegfried Kracauer categorized Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light* as part of a "surge of pro-Nazi tendencies during the pre-Hitler period" that was characterized "by the evolution of the mountain film."[14] Identifying similarities between the images of cloud-enveloped mountains of the mountain film genre and the clouds surrounding the machine-borne Führer in *Triumph of the Will*, Kracauer also saw a continuity between Riefenstahl's Junta character and "a political regime which relies on intuition, worships nature and cultivates myth."[15]

Kracauer's efforts to establish a continuity between Riefenstahl's pre-Nazi work and Nazism informs Susan Sontag's examination of the continuity between Riefenstahl's Nazi-era and postwar work. Sontag, like Kracauer, offers an anatomy of Nazi aesthetics:

> Fascist aesthetics include but go far beyond the rather special celebration of the primitive to be found in *The Last of the Nuba*. [Riefenstahl's book of photos of the Nuba tribe] More generally, they flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain: they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude.[16]

Reserving special status for Riefenstahl among artists like Céline, Benn, Marinetti, Pound, Hamsun, and others who became Fascist sympathizers, Sontag depicts Riefenstahl as "the only major artist who was completely identified with the Nazi era and whose work, not only during the Third Reich but thirty years after its fall, has consistently illustrated the many themes of fascist aesthetics."[17] But where Kracauer's analysis is too schematic, suggesting perhaps a "linear route from glaciers to *Gleichschaltung*,"[18] Sontag's analysis suffers similar problems. In fact, her portrayal of Fascism also maintains a now largely disputed view of Nazi culture as purely retrograde: "Nazi art is reactionary, defiantly outside the century's mainstream of achievement in the arts."[19] Elaborating and modifying Kracauer's and Sontag's respective arguments, Eric Rentschler contends that Riefenstahl's seeming "romantic sentimentality" and "antimodern persuasion" constitute in fact a "reactionary modernism," that is, a nonsynchronous blend of pre-modern fantasies and technological instrumentalism.[20] Riefenstahl's debut feature, a film which employs high modernist techniques and technology to form its vision of a mythical pre-urban Germanic existence, is a "master text" in the history of Nazi cinema. Rentschler concludes: "As a work of art and an artifact, *The Blue Light* anticipates and embodies the operations of the cinematic machine under National Socialism."[21]

The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl attempts to address these debates about Riefenstahl's aesthetics, raising similar questions about Riefenstahl's representation of the human body, of nature, of heroic sacrifice, of an idealized Germanic existence. At one point, Müller even asks Riefenstahl to reply to Sontag's analyses. Riefenstahl maintains she has no

idea what a Fascist aesthetic might be and responds: How could an intelligent woman like Sontag write such things? This evasive personalized refutation is strangely apposite in the context of a film so heavily focused on Riefenstahl's own person. Neither Müller's film nor its subject succeeds (hers is a more willful failure, to be sure) in penetrating the question of filmic aesthetics and their larger social significance. But, where Müller's absorption in Riefenstahl's person and personal achievements as a filmmaker disables his critique of her aesthetics, it nevertheless provides insight into Riefenstahl's views on culture and cultural production. These views, while cloaked in a discourse of artistic creation and individualism, in no way contradict the conformist culture of National Socialism. For Riefenstahl represents a kind of anti-establishment aesthetic that in fact became instrumental to Germany's film establishment. This aesthetic enabled Nazism to present itself as the rebellious reformer of a "corrupt" Weimar culture.

Assailing both mass culture and the fetishization of high culture (Riefenstahl's categorical refuge), Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer theorize the relation of culture and collective understanding in their darkly hyperbolic essay "The Culture Industry." Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the seeds of Nazi mass manipulation and the destruction of public life appear in Weimar film and persist after the war:

> In Germany the graveyard stillness of the dictatorship already hung over the gayest films of the democratic era. . . . The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. The old experience of the moviegoer, who sees the world as an extension of the film he has just left (because the latter is intent on reproducing the world of everyday perceptions), is now the producer's guideline. The more intensely and flawlessly his techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the world outside is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen.[22]

Mobilizing a medium already widely popular in Weimar Germany, National Socialism attempted to libidinally bind and persuade the German public. Hollywood, the Frankfurt theorists exhort, displays no different intent. Film is thus a fraudulent mimesis that displaces reality and beguiles its viewers with a fantasy world that uniformly reproduces and masks a situation of social domination. Although Adorno himself retains a much more complex view of film and mass culture, the "Culture Industry" essay, in its all too simple continuity from Weimar to German Fascism and postwar culture, overlooks the creative and political potential manifested in Weimar's fantasy, horror, and workers' films as well as in Riefenstahl's modernist features and documentaries. Riefenstahl, who rejects a notion of film that endeavors to represent reality at all, thus seems to evade Adorno and Horkheimer's categorization. Her claim to fame, which Müller discusses at length in the segments on *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia,* lies in her introduction of visually exciting narrative/fictive techniques into the traditionally "objective" form of documentary.

But she is far from being one to buck tradition. Firmly locating herself within the dialectic of enlightenment outlined by Adorno and Horkheimer, Riefenstahl employs categories of a now defunct bourgeois liberalism to ideological ends. In appealing to the category of art-for-art's-sake in effort to disavow the political content of her work, Riefenstahl shows herself to be a cultural fetishist whose strategies of self-exculpation rely on a fetishized reception of high culture. Although she refuses the mimesis of Nazi and Hollywood cinemas, she nevertheless embraces an equally fraudulent formalism, which reveals itself to be simply a technical prowess she attempts to marshal to her defense. The ideological nature of this pseudo-formalism becomes clear in her assertion of indifference to the contents of a film like *Triumph of the Will.* Technique alone is transcendent for her, and she hopes postwar students of film will exonerate her on this basis. Presenting her films as art in opposition to what she derides as Nazi "kitsch," Riefenstahl endeavors to gain distance from popular culture while she sustains the operative lie of Nazi cultural politics—that its cultural products were disinterested and unpolitical.

The Nazi spectacle of massive public events, monumental architectural projects, and standardized mass media bequeaths to postwar culture a more diffused type of media spectacle, which has been theorized in another critical context by Guy Debord, whose focus is the postindustrial situation of capitalist domination in Western nations.[23] "Spectacle" with regard to Riefenstahl refers not so much to Debord's deeply pessimistic notion of a spectacle that "dupes" its passive consumers as to her claims to a hermetically sealed world of art. Her view recalls the second paragraph of *The Society of the Spectacle*:[24]

> Reality considered *partially* unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world *apart*,

> an object of mere contemplation in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself.[25]

Riefenstahl's own world of the autonomous image was not only especially compatible with Nazi cultural politics, it could also be subtly recycled in discourses of cultural fetishism about art and auteurist film after 1945. Müller's camera, meanwhile, surely beholds a liar: She had no erotic contact with Goebbels? What about the entries in his diaries? Or, Hitler? Or Nazi millenarianism? How about this triumphalist telegram to Hitler when he marched into Paris? Did Riefenstahl use gypsies from a concentration camp in her film *Tiefland*, made during the war? How much did she know about the concentration camps? As she denies all knowledge and emphatically answers all questions in the negative, Müller consistently supplies evidence to the contrary. His efforts to expose these "lies" in the positivist sense do much to indict her as a public figure. Yet Riefenstahl's spectacle—her will to mendacity, as Debord would have it—transcends the particular facts of her own existential choices. This nonagenarian director appears in Müller's documentary as one particularly fascinating originator of the specular "pseudo-world *apart*" and certainly the most historically tainted defender of cultural disinterest and indifference. In this sense, she is the "undead" of Nazism, its ever vigorous spirit in postwar culture.

Popular response to Müller's documentary intuitively understands Riefenstahl's legacy in postwar culture, where beguiling image-making is now so ubiquitous that "lying" may well be too strong a word. A review in the Canadian popular weekly, *Maclean's*, offers an example:

> As an interrogator, Müller is no match for his subject, who often talks back to him like a temperamental diva. . . . Almost nothing is revealed of Riefenstahl's personal life (she has lived with technician Horst Kettner, 42 years her junior, since 1968), not to mention how she has managed to preserve herself so miraculously well—where is Barbara Walters when you need her?[26]

Like a true celebrity, Riefenstahl stages tantrums and elicits tabloid-style interest in her love life and perhaps also her plastic surgeon. Riefenstahl, however, is no Hollywood denizen. She may fascinate as much as any, but her powers of voyeuristic seduction arise from her connection to Nazism and the role she played as one of National Socialism's most visible and personally intriguing imagemakers. Postwar viewers look back upon her still dazzling images and are even more captivated by the works and personality that made them because of their radical specular innovation and the social force they represent. Susan Sontag offers the most provocative analysis of Riefenstahl's increased powers of fascination—only she assumes Riefenstahl's sudden rediscovery in the 1970s was due to public indifference to National Socialism:

> It is not that Riefenstahl's Nazi past has suddenly become acceptable. It is simply that, with the turn of the cultural wheel, it no longer matters. Instead of dispensing a freeze-dried version of history from above, a liberal society settles such questions by waiting for cycles of taste to distill out the controversy.[27]

Sontag is both right and wrong in her estimation of Riefenstahl's renewed powers of fascination in the last few decades. She is right in so far as efforts to rehabilitate Riefenstahl tend to operate in the world of laissez-faire aestheticism where art is autonomous from politics and films are seen as free from their contexts of national cinemas. However, Sontag is wrong if she thinks Riefenstahl's connection to Nazism no longer matters. Rather, such a past simply figures differently. It becomes a source of interest and perhaps also reaction. Where Sontag refers to auteurists and their claims for the recovery of Riefenstahl's work apart from her past, Müller's film elicits a less highfalutin, increasingly titillated, and emphatic response, as typified by the reviewer in *Maclean's*.

But, if Riefenstahl is the star and diva of Müller's film, for all her mesmerizing and willful individualism she maintains an aesthetic to the contrary. Ultimately, she insists on the inevitable powerlessness of the individual before history, social institutions, and culture, and in so doing, perpetuates the idea of inescapable collective submission under National Socialism. As Müller questions her about the past, her every answer suggests that both she and her fellow Germans had little choice but to be duped and drawn in by Hitler and his Nazi institutions. But it does not follow that because Hitler and Goebbels attempted to administer culture to the German people, the Germans had no ability to form their own opinions about it. Nor does it follow that a such a high-profile individual as Riefenstahl remained so utterly incapable of shaping her own life choices. Yet this is exactly how Riefenstahl views her personal history as well as that of the German public, whom she diagnoses as suffering from an unlucky combination of obedient character and authoritarian

Riefenstahl discussing *Triumph of the Will* with Adolf Hitler, from *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*

social conditioning. When Müller plays Riefenstahl a tape of Marlene Dietrich's comments on Germany's desire for conformity in the 1930s, Riefenstahl appears more than willing to concur. Müller and Riefenstahl sit listening to the voice of the absent Dietrich as she slurs her words in that famous whisky tenor:

> We Germans wanted a Führer, right? We got one, right? We Germans are like that, we want a Führer. . . . And what happens? Along comes this ghostly Hitler and we say, great, finally someone who will tell us what do.

Although Riefenstahl merely affirms Dietrich's none too sophisticated lounge-speak theory of the Germanic will to conformity, these words spoken by an irreverent Weimar "outsider" resonate differently when sustained by Riefenstahl, the Nazi insider. Riefenstahl elaborates on Dietrich's statements by asserting that all Germans learn discipline at school and at home (Müller cuts to a photograph of Riefenstahl as a small child with her family) and come to desire an authoritarian model. These universalizing claims about the German disposition are, however, particular to her own aesthetics, which she expounds upon during *The Blue Light* and *Olympia* sequences. Whether she essentializes Germanic culture or plays the victim exposed to inauspicious historical events, Riefenstahl attempts to remove the burden of responsibility both from herself as a public figure and from the German public who once admired her and consumed her images.

Towards the end of the film, there is a montage of the eyes of Riefenstahl's Junta character and a black-and-white close-up of Hitler's demonic-looking gaze, suggesting perhaps that Riefenstahl played Hitler's muse, or that she might have been a female Faust figure to Hitler's Mephistopheles.[28] This image intends to answer Müller's earlier question: whether Riefenstahl's dealings with Hitler were a "triumph of her own will, or a pact with the devil." But Riefenstahl is not simply the vain artist who got in over her head with the Nazis, because she, like Faust, was hungry for knowledge and power. She was and remains a key player. If Nazi cinema was, according to Eric Rentschler, an "other-directed cinema,"[29] which "enabled the Germans to withstand awful truths and ignore hideous presentiments,"[30] Riefenstahl figures as one of its contributors whose own persona and aesthetics of rugged individualism ultimately served the conformist ends of the regime.

Riefenstahl is an auteur, unlike many of the Nazi directors, and it is her unique film talents which compromise rather than, as she would hope, absolve her. The brand of image-making which once served the centralized cultural politics of the Third Reich now persists in other more diffused media spectacles that aim to excite the emotions and elide the material circumstances of their given context. Though not the lone source of postwar media spectacles, her work forms a caesura, after which it is impossible to think of film without its instrumental social function and its ideologically defensive claims to substantive aesthetic merit. This combination of politically volatile image-making and political disavowal is Riefenstahl's special contribution to twentieth-century culture.

Every disavowal is a spectacular performance, and the documentary is full of these. Asked to reflect on the aesthetics of National Socialism and the mobilization of culture under the Third Reich, Riefenstahl retorts with impatient theatrical innocence, "What is a fascist aesthetic? A Heil Hitler greeting?" Early in the film she also makes an off-handed remark about the Sieg Heil, pitting herself and her own personal aesthetics against

history and Nazism. After arguing with Müller on a mountain top about the best way to frame her against the peaks, telling him he has to find a "filmic solution" to the problem of framing her properly, she finally acquiesces, readies herself for the cameras and then says, looking somewhat persecuted, "Don't tell me you want a Hitler salute?" The crew laughs in good humor, because she's agreed to follow Müller's direction and seems to be showing a little self-reflexive irony. Nothing could be farther from the case. Appearing in a shot that conflicts with her aesthetics and technical expertise, she acts as though the one-time Nazi gesture of faith is being foisted upon her against her will by a postwar generation that understands nothing of her personal contributions to film form.

But although Riefenstahl doesn't know it, Müller has indeed found a filmic solution to representing her. Either unable or unwilling to emulate Riefenstahl's technique, *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* offers a resolutely unartistic spectacle. To be sure, this is not the only filmic solution to representing Riefenstahl. It is possible to imagine other kinds of efforts that engage rather than avoid her style, but *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* devotes its energies to content and to eliciting a statement from its subject. Riefenstahl's pronouncements in the film prevent her from being seen solely as an auteur whose techniques alone merit study—even if merely to study them as a blueprint for persuasive image-making. On the contrary, studying Riefenstahl means taking her ideas and status as a public figure into account alongside her oeuvre. For it is not simply enough to recognize the technical contributions of *Olympia* in contemporary sports photography, or to acknowledge her influence in the artfulness of officially sponsored media events, or to understand how seemingly apolitical feature films do in fact reinforce cultural values. The mother of modern image-making is also the guardian of postwar cultural cynicism. Riefenstahl's insistence that art inhabits a sphere separate from politics and that individuals remain without agency or responsibility before institutions might sound strikingly unoriginal and somewhat trite were it not for the fact that she was on the Nazi scene when such ideas were being tested in practice.

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Notes

1. Two preliminary versions of this essay were given—in Toronto at the Post-projections II conference and in Chicago at the German Studies Association conference, both in 1995. I benefited from the commentary of my fellow panelists Marcia Klotz, Nora M. Alter, Geoffrey Waite, and Marc Silberman, and am indebted to Alex Cohen, who read and commented on all of the versions.
2. Thomas Elsaesser, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman," *Sight and Sound* v3, n2 (February, 1993):19.
3. Eric Rentschler documents efforts by auteurists in 1960s and 1970s to rehabilitate Riefenstahl on the basis of her art. In his article "Fatal Attractions: Leni Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light*," *October*, nr 48 (Spring, 1989), he quotes Kevin Brownlow's passionate defense of Riefenstahl: "Art transcends the artist. . . . Art and politics must never be confused . . . the old adages are forgotten instantly as the name Riefenstahl is raised. And it is our fault" (67). Critic John Simon asks if the past could "wipe out the fact of her greatness as an artist," and concludes that Leni Riefenstahl "may have compromised her humanity. But her artistic integrity, never." See his front-page review, "Leni Riefenstahl," *New York Times Book Review* (September 26, 1993):1.
4. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg complained, however, that in Germany his work has received "less acclaim from the public at large than is given to Riefenstahl when she is shown in art film theaters." See Marilyn Berlin Snell, "Germany's Heart: The Modern Taboo: An Interview with German Filmmaker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg," *New Perspectives Quarterly* v10, n1 (Winter, 1993):23.
5. Robert Sklar, "Her Talent Was Her Tragedy: An Interview with Ray Müller," *Cineaste* v20, n3 (Summer, 1993):22.
6. Ibid., 22.
7. Ibid., 24.
8. The respective fates of Riefenstahl and Dietrich are also telling. After Dietrich's death, it becomes clear that at least from a German perspective, she has not fared as well as Riefenstahl. The urbane foil to Riefenstahl's mountain-girl fantasy, who fled into exile and became an American citizen in 1939, was refused a public burial in Berlin in 1992 because many Germans still perceived her as a traitor. Gertrud Koch reflects on the controversy over Dietrich's internment in Berlin, which suggests many Germans still think of Dietrich as a traitor for having entertained American soldiers during the war. Gertrud Koch, "Dietrich's Destiny," *Sight and Sound* v2, n5 (September, 1992):22. See also Marjorie Garber, who has recently described Dietrich's cult status as a icon for gay culture and contemporary Madonna watchers: Marjorie Garber, "Strike a Pose," *Sight and Sound* v2, n5 (September, 1992):25.
9. Unlike many recent documentaries, which explore their subjects with formally innovative techniques that reflect on the film-making process itself, *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* adopts a traditional mode of documentary representation. Müller most employs what Bill Nichols calls the "expository" mode; see Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). For a recent article which discusses new documentary modes, see Linda Williams' discussions of

Shoah, *Roger and Me*, and *The Thin Blue Line* in "Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary," *Film Quarterly* v46, n3 (Spring, 1993).

10. Russell A. Berman, *Modern Culture and Critical Theory: Art, Politics, and the Legacy of the Frankfurt School* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989): 99.
11. Sklar, "Her Talent Was Her Tragedy," 24.
12. On her treatment of Balázs, see Rentschler, "Fatal Attractions: Leni Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light*."
13. Eric Rentschler has commented that this film "functions as crucial evidence in any apologia for Riefenstahl." Ibid., 48.
14. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 257.
15. Ibid., 259.
16. Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 91.
17. Ibid., 90.
18. Ibid., 140.
19. Ibid., 94.
20. Ernst Bloch's concept of nonsynchronism (*Ungleichzeitigkeit)* refers to the mixture of modern and traditional modes of existence in the same present moment that enabled Fascism to appeal to a displaced German middle class. See Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, translated by Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). The term "reactionary modernism" derives from Jeffrey Herf's study, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
21. Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 51.
22. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* trans. John Cumming [1972], (New York: Continuum, 1993), 126.
23. Cf. Jonathan Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory," *October* 50 (Fall, 1989). Crary discusses the origin of Debord's "society of the spectacle" in the 1920s and 30s with the rise of Fascism, the origins of television, synchronized sound in the movies, and the use of mass media techniques in Nazi Germany, 104-5.
24. Debord's much criticized notion of spectacle has most recently been discussed by Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1994). See also Martin Jay's discussion of Debord and spectacle in his *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993), 423-34.
25. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red Books, 1983), paragraph 2.
26. Brian D. Johnson, "The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl," *Maclean's* v107, n16 (April 18, 1994):74.
27. Sontag, ibid., 84.
28. One reviewer also takes up this Faust image, saying, "No, she was not to be Eliza Doolittle to Sternberg's Professor Higgins, as Dietrich is said to have described herself. Her destiny was to become a female Faust to Adolf Hitler's Mephistopheles." Robert Sklar, "The Devil's Director," *Cineaste* v20, n3 (Summer, 1993):20.
29. Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 216.
30. Ibid., 222.

Nora M. Alter

Marcel Ophüls' *November Days:*

And then Humpty Dumpty spoke to Alice:
"In winter when the fields are white,
I sing this song for your delight;
In spring when woods are getting green,
I'll try and tell you what I mean;
In summer when the days are long,
Perhaps you'll understand this song;
In autumn when the leaves are brown,
Take pen and ink and write it all down."

These lines from *Alice in Wonderland* are recited by Marcel Ophüls early in his film *November Days: Voices and Paths* (1990). It is his response to the events in the autumn of 1989 commonly depicted by the media as "the fall of the Wall" or "the fall of Communism." Today, pen and ink seem hardly sufficient. Not only has Humpty, a prototypical "wall jumper," plummeted, not only has the Berlin Wall itself collapsed, but also the "walls" between all the media that produce and/or document such events are increasingly fluid, making any referential truth content exceedingly difficult to grasp. Appropriately neither mass-mediaphobic nor mediaphilic, Ophüls took the somewhat unusual tack, in the context of this historical conjuncture, of selecting as his medium an essay film he himself has dubbed musical comedy.[1] This seemingly off-handed

November Days: Marcel Ophüls in interview mode

German Reunification as "Musical Comedy"

remark holds a key to grasping *November Days*—a multilayered genre straddling the unstable boundary between highbrow and lowbrow, and incorporating the mass media, albeit as critically as possible.[2]

Interviewing Paradoxes

Ophüls was commissioned by BBC 2 to make a film marking the one-year anniversary of the coming down of the Wall. The resulting *November Days* is just over two hours long (shorter by half than his previous major films). Composed as a series of interviews, mainly of former East German citizens from several walks of life, Ophüls shows BBC television coverage from November 1989, and then, through the remarkable detective work patented in earlier films, tracks down the same people in this found footage to interview. Thus the basic form of his film is a documentary insofar as it is a montage of found footage and live interview format—not unlike many other early filmic treatments of the event.[3] Uncharacteristic of many documentaries, however, is that Ophüls often interrupts his interviewees with his own comments, in some cases he even sings or hums bits of songs. Thus he works aggressively against the grain of the

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traditional generic norm in several ways, most interestingly by his "musical comedy."

Confronting Ophüls' audience initially are typical before and after sequences. For some East Germans unification has a happy ending; for others economic disaster threatens with loss of job as well as ideological anxiety to the point of dysfunction; and Stasi (the former state security police) agents face incarceration. Ophüls has long insisted on using film to attack what he called in 1972 "the horribly bourgeois attitude of believing that one can separate what is so conveniently called 'politics' from other human activities—e.g., profession, family life, love. This popular attitude constitutes the worst conceivable evasion of life, and of the responsibilities of life."[4] The man on the street is not the only focus of Ophüls' camera, interviewing as he also does former high officials in the government and police, including Egon Krenz (who replaced Erich Honecker as General Secretary of the Party and head of the country), Günter Schabowski (the Politburo member who announced that East Germans could travel to West), Markus Wolf (a major Stasi figure), and Walter Momper (the Mayor of West Berlin). Ophüls thus conveys the disintegration of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on several levels of civil society, and many of the internal pressures which led to its unravelling and subsequent unification with the West. He seems less interested in the external pressures—from both the West and the East, though he does allude to some. Alongside men and women representing what might be called the political economy of the GDR are leaders of its culture industry on several sides of the "velvet revolution." Ophüls has particularly long conversations with leading East German cultural workers, including writer Stephan Hermlin, the now recently deceased playwright Heiner Müller, Bertolt Brecht's daughter Barbara Brecht-Schall, symphony director Kurt Masur, and artist Bärbel Bohly, referred to as "the mother of the revolution." Oddly, fellow filmmakers are not interviewed. Also, some key figures, such as writer Christa Wolf, refused to meet with Ophüls, though they come up in conversation. And there is an interview with Michael Kühnen, a polite, articulate, high ranking neo-Nazi, or (as Slavoj Zizek might recommend we say) just plain Nazi.[5]

Among all of the interviews (many pitted one *against* another, and all interrupted in some way by editing), Ophüls recreates his signature version of the montage type that Walter Benjamin (rather uncritically) and Theodor Adorno (rather critically) called "dialectical image."[6] Which is to say that Ophüls intersplices, often with disruptive ironic effect, clips from old feature films, documentary footage from various periods of history, and other devices that undercut the verisimilitude and empathy commonly exuded by live interviews. After we hear Brecht-Schall denying she fraternised with Erich Honecker, we cut first to Heiner Müller, chomping a cigar à la Bertolt, and asserting this is simply untrue, then to documentary footage of Brecht-Schall talking amicably with Honecker at the Berlin Ensemble. This interview-editing technique is not the least reason why some people (notably Christa Wolf) refused to be interviewed.[7] Ophüls interjects himself into his interviews (and at one point his recording team is shown in a mirror), disrupting the still common assumption that a documentary is objective, its mechanism invisible—at least compared to feature films. It must be said, however, that it is Ophüls' privileged outsider/insider status that permits him to take his simultaneously engaged but also ironically distant stance—infuriating some of his interview subjects to whom he has a privileged access. It is Ophüls' ambiguous status that grants *November Days* a certain international and cosmopolitan critical perspective that is missing in German reunification films, which tend to be more obsessively self- and nation-centered. It is significant, in that sense, that in the film it is the Nazi Kühnen who defines "Jew" as (among other things) a "cosmopolitan" without national roots and allegiance. Ophüls himself wavers on this point. To Bohly's request (singular in the film) to say what *he* thinks of "unification," he replies that "the Germans have a right to self-determination just like other nations [or peoples: *Völker*]." He adds that he thinks that this process is "so positive that I can't understand peoples' anxiety, including yours." Whereupon the still socialist Bohly responds anxiously—but also forcefully—that she is more worried about the "little people" crushed by the juggernaut of privatisation. Ophüls offers no comment. His considered response, it seems, comes in the form of *November Days* as a whole, its musical comedy most specifically.

Tension is particularly evident in the interview when Ophüls attempts to pressure conductor Masur into saying that the latter's attempt to construct Socialism with a Human Face was "betrayed" by the "Banana-people," that is, those rejecting embattled socialist ideals (not to say realities) for full-blown consumer capitalism. Masur abruptly terminates the interview by saying that "no one has a right to ask such questions" unless one was involved in these matters oneself. Here a major blockage or aporia is reached, not only for Ophüls but for his audience. In a sense the silent interviewer and interviewee is us.

From Prodigal Son to Musical Comedy

Born in 1927 to a Jewish household, Marcel Ophüls moved to France with his family and filmmaker father, Max Ophüls (1902-1957), when Hitler came to power, and was forced to flee Europe for Hollywood in 1940. Here he grew up alongside Barbara Brecht, a childhood friend. Ophüls returned to France in 1950, where he was active in the radio and television industries before turning to film. His return to Germany in *November Days* constitutes a prodigal son's return to a *re*unified Germany. The last time it was unified, of course, was the Third Reich that once forcibly rejected him. The present unification means, for some of Ophüls' interviewed witnesses at least, the advent of a Fourth Reich—disturbing for some, welcome for others. The opposed ends of this spectrum are represented in the film by Kühnen, who hopes neo-Nazis in Eastern Germany will rally to his cause, and Brecht-Schall, who avers in her California-inflected English that she has never liked the Germans, maintaining against a caveat of Ophüls that they are still the same, and that she deeply mistrusts them.[8] The sometimes tense interviews with Masur and Kühnen, combined with Ophüls' remark to Bohly about national self-determination, form a crucial nexus that defines Ophüls own political un/conscious as being at once "inside" and "outside" his own filmic response to history. Somewhere in this ambivalent, excessive, "prodigal" space his musical comedy was conceived.

An early work, *Munich, ou la paix pour cent ans* (*Munich, or, The Hundred-Year Peace*, 1967) was already conceived as the first part of a vast historical trilogy. It began with the events leading up to World War II, but, like all Ophüls' subsequent films, interwove past and present in the unique audiovisual style that he calls not documentary but "non-fiction." Ophüls described his next major film, *Le chagrin et la pitié* (*The Sorrow and the Pity*, 1970), as "the movie of my life, like Conan Doyle and *Sherlock Holmes*—I try to get rid of it but it won't go away" and as a "biased film—in the right direction, I'd like to think—as biased as a Western with good guys and bad guys."[9] Tackling head-on the ultra-sensitive topic in France of its complicity with Nazism, *The Sorrow and the Pity* was denied broadcast on French television, although it had a deep impact in movie theaters there and elsewhere. As even its early reviewers noted, it scandalized not only because of its specific topic, not only because it punctured the general myth of Gaullist *grandeure française*, but because it perfected a new "compilation style" which shuttles back and forth between hard facts, montage, and narrative intervention.[10] But not least disturbing, I would argue, is that the film employed an early form, in its deadly serious context, of what we are here calling musical comedy. Thus, in the often gruelling *The Sorrow and the Pity*, music enters as ironic commentary in the final scene with Maurice Chevalier, the prototypical Frenchman, singing with his patented nonchalance: "Let the whole world sigh or cry/I'll be up on a rainbow/Sweeping the clouds away."[11]

Ophüls has of course refined his compilation style over the years, including his further reflection about French complicity with the Third Reich, *Hotel Terminus: Klaus Barbie, His Life and Times* (1988). But instead of concentrating, as critics commonly and rightly do, on the more general features of his technique and its concomitant mood of ironic distance and the like, I want to focus mainly on its musical comedy aspect, because I think that it, though a feature of nearly all his films, is also what makes *November Days* a unique contribution to reflection about the fall of the Wall—his other techniques having been more or less integrated by many filmmakers.

Ophüls' next major film after *The Sorrow and the Pity* was *The Memory of Justice* (1976). Also over four hours long, it related, in an often deeply personal way (through interviews with his German wife and American college students) the Nuremberg War Trials not only to Nazi war crimes but also to global violence: Dresden, Algeria, and Vietnam—thus turning the judgements at Nuremberg back on the accusers, but without falling into the revisionist trap of denying the significance of the Holocaust. (Ophüls was to take up contemporary violence again in *A Sense of Loss* [1972], on Northern Ireland, and *Veillées d'armes* [*Trouble I Have Seen*, 1994], on the rape and destruction of Sarajevo.) In *The Memory of Justice*, in response to his wife's stated preference that he make a different sort of film, more along the lines of Lubitsch or *My Fair Lady*, he in a sense does both ironically: by playing popular songs (e.g., "New Sun in the Sky," "That's Entertainment," and "I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plan") against the bleak landscape of Schleswig-Holstein, where he has gone in search of a former Nazi physician.[12] Thus these films are already informed forays into the complex experimental interplay between audio and visual tracks that is so striking in *November Days*.

It is noteworthy in that respect that *November Days*, following in the footsteps of Ophüls' other films, disturbed viewers as much on thematic grounds as formal. Something about the events in Germany in

autumn 1989 seems to have rendered them incompatible, in Ophüls' eyes, with usual or traditional representation. Perhaps it was their nearly total spectacularization in, and by, the public visual media.[13] Visual and aural historical documents—films, photographs, videos, tape recordings, TV and radio broadcasts—find themselves willy-nilly part of archival footage that becomes the source for future, more aesthetic (fictive), creations. The widely disseminated media images of the fall of the Wall seemingly came from a single collective pool or closed economy of signs: the same interviews with former border guards and Stasi informants, the same overall tone and mood imputing to a passive viewer a unified view of what life "over there" behind the Wall and what its fall were "really like." Particularly striking are the long takes and extensive footage of dismantling the Wall. As one critic in *The Times* laconically noted, "If you put all the Berlin Wall footage end to end you could cut the country in half again."[14] Yet it is the very obsessiveness of these film and TV images, and their recurrence—not to say repetition compulsion—that leads one to question what lies behind this unacknowledged consensus, uniformity, and homogeneity, what deeper suppressed or repressed event was being held at audiovisual bay precisely by ostensibly being fully shown and heard.

The subtitle of *November Days—Voices and Paths*—indexes the importance of aural testimony in the filmmaker's reflection on the still inconclusive paths taken by people during and after the collapse of the Wall. For surely the need for a new experimental form of *some* kind arose out of Ophüls' effort to destabilize a spectacularized topic to which audiences were already becoming numb, to force them to review it critically, and, to speak in Brechtian terms, to alienate them. As Ophüls explains in an interview, "People will be thoroughly fed up and jaded with the subject. I knew that I wanted to have a highly personal, subjective approach."[15] Reviewers around the globe generally responded to the film's musical aspect in basically opposed ways. Some praised it for attacking "the traditional style of the documentary by injecting snippets of popular musical culture into the serious discussion to delightfully subversive effect."[16] Others denounced "a 20th-century European melody in which nothing much happened very slowly, because Ophüls' editing had all the discipline and clarity of a sponge."[17] But neither superficial praise nor snide remarks do justice to the innovative nature, and contested impact, of Ophüls' self-designated musical comedy.

At least two dialectically related channels operate this musical comedy: "music" and "comedy," and it may be their combination that disturbed some viewers, moving the film out of its expected documentary mode. Musical comedy qua genre typically threatens to *exceed* classification—hence perhaps the contradictory reactions by reviewers to Ophüls' form. Musical comedy from its inception has been both a legitimate form of popular culture (hardly inappropriate, one might think, for a "people's revolution"), but also a vehicle for more or less explicit social commentary, linked by some critics to a psychosexual problematic (as is the use of sound in cinema generally).[18] Ophüls' choice of genre may be placed between highbrow (documentary) and lowbrow (musical comedy) but his editing is hardly "sponge-like." One must resist the all-too-common tendency to view music, and sound in general, as being merely a cosmetic feature of the film proper. Their apparent excess—like that of comedy and of prodigal sons—is rarely without point. Ophüls' carefully edited insertions of songs and other music (alongside old film clips and stills)[19] are themselves pieces of documentary evidence that—paradoxically—protect *November Days* from being mistaken as documentary pure and simple. So it is that his musical comedy inhabits the shadowland between "fiction" and "truth."[20]

I argue that Ophüls adds to his diegetic sound track (mostly interviews) a musical score that is not quite nondiegetic background but rather is located between the lines of diegesis, just as his added film clips and stills are disjunctions of the image track. Neither these dialectical images nor this dialectical sound track is commented on explicitly in the film by Ophüls' occasional voice-over. As was the case with the nexus of political un/consciousness emerging between the lines of the interviews with Schall-Kühnen-Bohly-Masur, the significance must be coproduced *by* the audience; it is not presented *to* it by metacommentary within the film. These audiovisual insertions exceed the diegetic world of the film, which also includes Ophüls' incorporated BBC broadcasts. (If the overall sound track might be called "A," and the musical "a," then the visual footage would be "B," with the incorporated docu-footage "b"—but only if it is understood that the priorities can reverse themselves semantically; sometimes the minor key turning out to be major.) To grasp their function, which is strictly neither diegetic nor nondiegetic, yet contaminated by both, it is important to note those moments when Ophüls hums or sings words to a song, sometimes encouraging his interviewees to sing along, before or

after the same song is heard in professional recording. Ophüls' own prodigal body, as it were, serves as the point of articulation between diegetic space and nondiegetic space—both of which contain elements that are fictional or artful as well as non-fictional or factual.[21] In terms of his notion of musical comedy, the main point seems to be that Ophüls is attempting to direct his documentary much as he might direct a musical comedy. This is not to argue that Ophüls necessarily comes across as a cabaret artist *manqué*, but rather that for *November Days* German reunification has important *aspects* that can be illuminated *by*—indeed *as*—musical comedy properly grasped.

The critic who referred to the editing of Ophüls' "20th-century European melody" as having the discipline and clarity of a sponge was not entirely off the mark, however, albeit for the wrong reasons and without the pejorative implications. For, if the film is not easy to decipher, it could be because it echoes Roland Barthes' thesis about a special "third meaning" in film. He argues that we read signs in cinema on an informational level, on a symbolic level, and finally on a third level that eludes designation and that he calls "obtuse meaning." For Barthes, "the obtuse meaning appears to extend outside culture, knowledge, information; analytically, it has something derisory about it: opening out into the infinity of language, it can come through as limited in the eyes of analytic reason; it belongs to the family of pun, buffoonery, useless expenditure. Indifferent to moral or aesthetic categories (the trivial, the futile, the false, the pastiche), it is on the side of the carnival."[22] Thus it entails thematic and structural *excess*—not unlike comedy, music, and prodigal status. While Barthes applies his theory to visual imagery (analysing stills from a silent film by Eisenstein), we can extend it to sound track as well. In *November Days*, cinematic "excesses" in the audio and the visual tracks push meaning to another, more properly dialectical—and musical-comical—level of thematic and formal significance, one appropriate to the full complexity—not to say obtuseness—of the historical event in question.

The Music of the Declared Dead

Which takes us back to the story line. *November Days* opens with newsreel footage of Honecker at the East Berlin Airport (October 6, 1989—the 40th anniversary of the GDR) awaiting the arrival of Gorbachev, who the next day will decline to intervene in German affairs. (Honecker shouts to Western journalists: "Die Totgesagten leben lange!" ("Those declared dead live long!") At this historical moment pregnant with in/decision, Ophüls freezes his frame (anticipating our ability to do this ourselves when watching a videotape on TV), and only his own voice propels the narrative past this still point (Benjamin's "dialectics at a standstill").[23] A disembodied, controlling, and authoritative voice-over is standard fare for documentaries, of course; only later in the film will Ophüls insert himself into the interviews to counter such "neutral" pretensions. His first cut now is to a series of still photographs of the Americans, British, French, and Soviets immediately after the war—cheerfully photographing one another as they carve up Berlin into its four sectors.

The 1945 still photos captured both the unity of purpose in the defeat of Nazism and the division of Germany. By contrast, the 1989/90 moving pictures capture at once the reunification of Germany but also, if we allow the im/perceptible chiasmus in its logic, a return drift toward Fascism. The sound track is Marlene Dietrich, another exile, singing in English "September Song": "It's a long, long while/From May till December/And the days grow short/When you reach September/When the autumn weather/Turns the leaves to flame/One has no time/For the waiting game." Two visual cuts follow: first to a still of children playing by the Berlin Wall with their ball suddenly frozen mid-air. Then a cut to another still: an old man playing cello against the palimpsest-graffitied Wall. This is a widely disseminated photograph of Mstislav Rostropovich (dubbed by *Time* magazine, when it printed the photo, "one of America's cold war trophies"),[24] playing in front of graffiti of Mickey Mouse. Ophüls' camera zooms in on him and his cello while "September Song" continues in the background. Thus a sound bridge sutures the disparate visual narrative spaces, as if the still photograph were generating the musical score on the sound track. The image of the cello player helps establish the role that music will play throughout the film against the "text" of the Wall; and it also anticipates later images of cellos in documentary footage of Masur's Leipzig Philharmonic playing Schiller's "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony—the very icon of transtemporal human solidarity. In this audiovisual palimpsest, Dietrich's "September Song" has at once diegetic and nondiegetic significance, and is as important as the visual track in struggling to represent the approaching days of November. Against the graffitied Wall (an

image obsessively proliferated by the Western mass media as the symbol for resistance to tyranny) we hear music signalling a type of audio graffiti—graffiti that flows via sound waves breaking through history and our subconscious. We may also be reminded of Helke Sanders' *Redupers* (1977),[25] in which Berlin is shown and heard, long before the collapse of the Wall, with a montage of radio broadcasts in English, French, German, and Russian generating an ideological sound space that at once severs and unites East and West. Music in *November Days* becomes a form of graffiti, the image of Rostropovitch forging a loop of audiovisual graffiti. On Barthes's "informational" level, "September Song" tells how quickly time flies from May to December. On the "symbolic" level, it reminds the hearer both of "the waiting game" and of how quickly in the larger, "natural" scheme of things, the Wall and the East fell. On yet another, more obtuse level, Dietrich's singing in English recalls not only her self-imposed exile from Germany and Weimar Cinema but also Ophüls' father, forced to find a career in Hollywood, not to mention so many others who were unable to escape Nazi terror. The next sound we hear after Dietrich is British school children reciting the lines "Humpty Dumpty had a great fall . . . and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." It is superimposed, first, on an illustration from *Alice in Wonderland*, then on footage of goose-stepping GDR soldiers changing the guard. *This* is the moment Ophüls picks to insert his own recitation from *Alice*—the epigram of my essay—as the image track changes to show footage of old Honecker walking with his entourage away from the camera into the October woods.

Ophüls' obtuse audiovisual, intertextual, and existential loop thus subtends his own prodigal return to make a film about German *re*unification—a comedy in the common sense that it *appears* to have a happy end. A layered history of meanings can thus overdetermine the re/presentation of tiny snippets of popular songs. The location of such surplus meanings is not so much in the film, as either information or symbolism, but just below the level of conscious perception, which is layered musically. The obtuse status of this musical comedy is hardly, in that sense, "a very subjective film about Marcel Ophüls going back to Germany."[26] For each time Ophüls points to himself, he also turns his musical comedy away from himself to larger history.

Ophüls first starts humming Gershwin's "'S Wonderful" before the recording is played. He is inspired by an interview with West Berliner Susi Fischer, who was captured by BBC cameras as she crawled over the Wall in the "other" direction. Ophüls tracks her down months later, and asks her to recall her feelings at the time. The word "wonderful" comes up, leading Ophüls to a discussion of flirting—standard fare of the musical comedy. Further associations with flirting brings us to East German Werner Schäfer, who hints at the sexual freedom that the collapse of the Wall promises. Schäfer admits to leaving his wife in the East ("over there") and moving in with a West German woman for a few months—the women of the West representing the allure of the sexual, the erotic, the exotic.[27] As in virtually any musical comedy, song and sex form a momentary bridge between different national and class identities. At this point Dietrich starts "Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss/Auf Liebe eingestellt/Denn das ist meine Welt/Und sonst gar nichts!" Then, after lingering a minute longer on Schäfer and contemporary Berlin, Ophüls recuts to Dietrich in a notorious clip from *The Blue Angel* (1930).[28] The repressed, then liberated, sexuality of Weimar Professor Unrat echoes and reinforces the perceived repression (sexual and other) of the former GDR. With Dietrich (who joined yet another exile, *Blue Angel*'s director Joseph von Sternberg, in Hollywood, where he continued to promote her career), still singing on a record, Ophüls cuts to Armistice Day footage in 1945, then to contemporary West Berlin discos. He interviews former East German waiter Mario Kähl, who frequents these scenes. Not a shy man in the past, the waiter opines that with Western women things are different, for currently he has "inhibitions" (*Hemmungen*). West German women are for him a trophy, suggesting the persistence of a deep class divide that continues post-Wall to separate East from West, (some) men from (some) women. Kähl's inhibitions do not prevent him from showing off a dance step for Ophüls' camera. No Fred Astaire, nonetheless his performance adds another layer of social satire to this musical comedy.

Another *November Days* number, Bing Crosby's "Song of Freedom," serves to evoke aspects (or claims) of Cold War democracy after World War II. This allows Ophüls and Brecht-Schall to debate the significance of the lyrics on both sides of the Wall, highlighting it in the diegetic space: freedom to "speak and hear," freedom from "want and fear," and freedom to "sail the seven seas." The interlocutors pose momentarily as rival music critics of this bit of popular musical culture. Later Ophüls turns to a German musical of the 1930s, *Weisse Rössl*. The male lead, Der Gute Sigismund, was originally supposed to

be a Jew. As Ophüls (who sings some of the lyrics) informs the unaware actor, Carl Jung, currently playing the role on stage, the Jewish referent was entirely dropped from the 1990 performance in West Berlin. Ophüls also would have us recall Krenz's plea in the film that "not all the 40 years of the GDR were shit." The resulting obtuse meaning is musical-comically complex. If Jews have been erased out of German history (and Nazism out of East German history as a mere byproduct of capitalism) then, by filmic syllogism, will the years of Communism also simply be eradicated from German history in the future? Where will they go? When will they resurface?

Ophüls' penultimate music score is Masur's chorus of men and women in the former GDR singing Schiller's and Beethoven's "Alle Menschen werden Brüder." But even this quintessential highbrow feel-good and happy-end paean to unification becomes suspect, deconstructed. For the accumulated associations in the film (notably the inconclusive conversations earlier with Brecht-Schall and Bohly about the self-identity of the German *Volk*) suggest that today in Germany this song is taken to refer less to a unified Europe—let alone world—than to *German* hegemony. (Predictably, the irony pointed out by Ophüls seems to have eluded the Goethe Institute's official film about unification, which used the same song and score as its sound track.) Again Ophüls takes pains to position his musical comedy as a social commentary spanning horrific past, ambivalent present, uncertain future. Richard Wagner famously held that with Beethoven the symphony had reached the ultimate form of purely musical expression, and so required the insertion of sung words. And so he chose the Ninth Symphony to instaurate Bayreuth—its "music drama of the future," its claim to unify Germany. This was arguably the modernist origin of the peculiarly powerful *Gesammtkunstwerk* known as cinema.[29] By middle- or lowbrow analogy, Ophüls' film similarly stakes out a new position for musical comedy, not to say mass culture generally, in the critical analysis of cultural politics.

For his final audiovisual "song," Ophüls picks "Money" from another musical comedy about Berlin: *Cabaret*, "Hollywood's first foray into decadent chic."[30] Bob Fosse's 1972 film was based on *Berlin Diaries* by Christopher Isherwood—yet another kind of exile from Weimar Germany. *November Days* ends with a montage between, on the one hand, Liza Minnelli's eroticized singing of "Money" in the Weimar of *Cabaret* and, on the other, East Germans exchanging their now worthless currency for Deutschmarks.[31] Earlier in his film, Ophüls had failed in his attempts to get interview subjects to sing along (Brecht-Schall and the Mayor of Berlin), and did not presume to pressure conductor Masur. But now former East German commoners cheerfully comply—almost. Apparently Ophüls has reminded them of the lyrics to "Money," and some stop just short of breaking into song, lip-synching only the keyword from the chorus: "money! money! money!" This is not the first time in the history of cinema where reference to money puts a sinister final spin on a feel-good film.[32] For its part, Ophüls' dialectical sound-image is diachronic and synchronic: back to Weimar's point of transition to the Third Reich; fast-forward to the twenty-first century; and laterally to the musical comedy's uncanny location of the psychosocial space called late capitalism.

In Lieu of Conclusion

The double innovative thrust of the musical comedy—formal and thematic—defines Ophüls' original contribution to the cultural response of German reunification. It is through his musical comedy that he sought to combat the highly mass-mediatized representations in relentless circulation, and to pose hard questions about a political event that was by no means as homogeneous as it was represented. The events in Germany in the autumn of 1989 were transmitted by televisions across the world. Whether tuned into CNN, CBS, BBC, ZDF, TELE 1, or whatever, not only Germans but a world-wide audience ostensibly became united in its consumption—its illusion of coproduction—of the collapse and attendant funeral of socialism and Communism and the triumph of liberal democracy.[33] These overdetermined and largely unprocessed political developments tended to be transmitted—as if they were phenomenologically unmediated and without requiring analysis—by means of a relentless repetition, and thus reinforcement, of the same series of images, a veritable closed economy of the audiovisual archive: East and West Germans clambering over the Wall and dancing; the Wall being physically dismantled by hand; exhaust-belching Trabis passing unhindered through former checkpoints; unchecked consumption of "bananas"; and so forth. A single week witnessed the transformation of the democratic, still Communist slogan "Wir sind das Volk!" (we are the people) into the ethnic and nationalist "Wir sind ein Volk!" (we are one people).[34] Projected to the world out of Germany's extreme

uncertainty and upheaval, in a situation which was by no means as clear as it was imagined to be, was a simulacrum composed of unified images and sounds of clarity, decisiveness, and above all optimism—all tempered by uncanny anxieties just beneath the audiovisual surface. If there were lingering doubts about the reality of the events, "one only had to go to a department store where the edited and packaged media highlights of these historic moments were available on video cassette almost immediately."[35] Real ambivalence, hesitation, and contradictions were rarely shown or heard explicitly. Nonetheless, it is dangerous to buy into a wholly monolithic, totalitarian view of the mass media. Behind and within the simulacrum the anxieties were real enough, im/perceptible "between the lines." In other words, following Fredric Jameson's theory of the political unconscious, it is in the fissures and flaws of narrative texts that the political emerges in ways that are—by turns or simultaneously—visible and audible, invisible and inaudible.[36] It was with and within such gaps that what is unique about Ophüls' "musical comedy" emerges, and that we may hear and see it.

In contrast to *November Days*, the majority of the earlier, especially German, documentary films of reunification—even while emphasizing the stifling and paranoid bureaucratic aspect of a regime that allowed little freedom of expression—were formally conservative.[37] That is, ironically, they tended to reproduce on film, as film, the same dry and one-dimensional control that they attributed to the regime under attack, thus reperforming and recuperating aesthetically the totality they abhorred politically. Ophüls' cinematic innovation in this problematic may be clarified theoretically by a link we can make between Stephen Heath's "narrative space" in cinema and Henri Lefebvre's general "production of abstract space." It is precisely here, I have been suggesting, that we encounter Ophüls' audiovisual space as musical comedy.

Heath argues that narrative space is how cinema both enables and constrains viewers to produce an ostensibly unified sense of mental and physical space out of the necessarily partial shots and sequences of a film (using establishing shots, eye-line matches, point of view shots, reverse angles, and other suturing devices).[38] An ideological effect is articulated with a formal apparatus, much as in the early film responses to the collapse of the GDR and its Wall. For his part, Lefebvre suggests:

> We already know several things about abstract space. As a product of violence and war, it is political; instituted by the state, it is institutional. On first inspection it appears homogeneous; and indeed it serves those forces which make it a tabula rasa of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them—in short of differences. These forces seem to grind down and crush everything before them, with space performing the function of a plane, a bulldozer or a tank. The notion of the instrumental homogeneity of space, however, is illusory—though empirical descriptions of space reinforce the illusion—because it uncritically takes the instrumental as a given.[39]

Replacing "space" by "wall" in this argument, we find that the relentlessly homogeneous filmic images of destruction carried out by human hands and bulldozers betray the presence of something more enduring and much harder to destroy: the ideological barrier between the two States and alternative ideologies—an *introjected* wall more indestructible than any concrete could ever be. (This was the problematic predicted in 1977 in Sanders' *Redupers*.) It seems one can only continually either act out this political unconscious—this in/visible and in/audible beneath the surface of perception—or work through this space in all its concrete abstraction and abstract concreteness. Taking the latter tack in our hypermediatized condition, a filmmaker and/or audience can attempt to navigate the false choice or antinomy between mediaphobia and mediaphilia, allowing oneself to *incorporate* the mass media albeit as critically as possible. This, I think, is Ophüls' main tack: musical-comically.

Toward the end of *November Days*, Ophüls tracks down an old proletarian—first shown in footage of Party members in early November singing for the last time "The International"—apparently waving his Party card in time to the music.[40] Asked why he waved his card, the old man denies having done so. Remembering the earlier exposure of Brecht-Schall's lie about her relation to Honecker, our first reaction is that this rank-and-film Communist, too, is lying. Then Ophüls replays the clip without verbal comment. If we are attentive, we see that the man is waving not his card but a clenched fist. In the sea of cards raised by others, it only seems that he is holding one too. The difference may appear inconsequential, yet it is meaningful in terms of the complexity of the events at hand, the struggle to differentiate truth from falsehood, and the often extreme import of the most minuscule distinctions. In that sense, the sequence cuts

two ways. The old man might seem to have evaded the issue by a technicality or sophistry; and, since he still describes himself as Communist, Communism itself may seem further discredited. On the other hand, a deeper and more obtuse point of this musical comedy is that Ophüls himself has *misread* documentary film footage in his own film, *and* that he allows us to see and hear this fact.

This is a standard problem in the psychology of perception called the phantom percept, as developed for painting by E. H. Gombrich and for film by Teresa De Lauretis.[41] Briefly, the phantom percept permits a viewer to extrapolate from fragmentary sense data a unified whole—which may or may not turn out to be accurate, in the sense of being confirmed by other empirical evidence taken as fact. As De Lauretis notes, the percept is also a basic "*social* contract by which external consistency is given up or traded against the internal coherence of the illusion" (62). In *November Days*, I conclude, the phantom percept as contract is ironic: it foregrounds not only an audiovisual or musical-comic but also a profound social problematic, even as the promise of Communism in "The International" *seems* to fade away forever. It gives way to other music, including Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," with a singularly nationalist inflection. Let us not forget, however, that the film's final "international" number is "Money, money, money. . . ."

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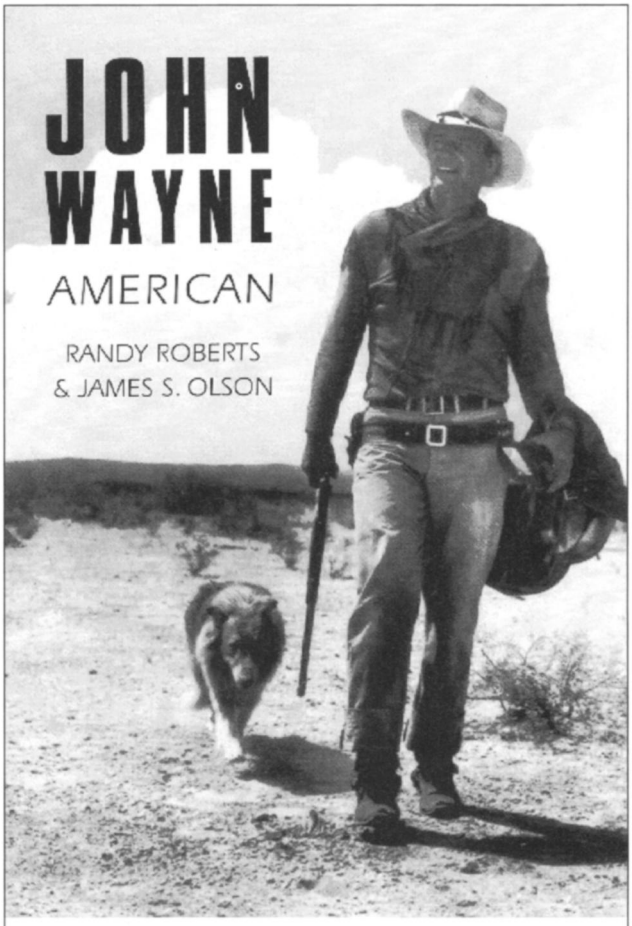
Notes

1. Ophüls as cited by Kevin Jackson in his interview "Just Singin' round the Wall," *The Independent*, November 9, 1990.
2. "Incorporation" in this sense means "to obtain pleasure by making an object penetrate oneself; it means to destroy this object; and it means, by keeping it within oneself, to appropriate the object's qualities." Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1975), 212.
3. For the most part, the films about the wall between 1989 and 1991 tended to be documentaries to one degree or other, their cameras mostly recording the events that took place in Germany with little or no analysis. Obviously economic constraints were a factor, since documentaries are generally cheaper to produce, and respond more quickly to current events, than features. In 1989, within weeks of the collapse of the Wall, two short films, *Leipzig in Autumn* and *The New Look Wandlitz,* appeared. In 1990 there was a veritable explosion, including films such as Ulrike Ottinger's three-hour *Countdown I and II*, and, in the United States, Marilyn Levine and Ross McElwee's *Something to Do with the Wall*. The following year more films emerged, some of these included a personal tone motivated by a "true story/I was there" narrative, as in Sibylle Schönemann's *Verriegelte Zeit* (*Locked-Up Time*, 1991). Established directors joined the fray, particularly in France. In addition to *November Days*, there was Chris Marker's *Berlin '90* and Jean-Luc Godard's obsessively intertextual essay film *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero*. It was not until 1992 that the topic of reunification was addressed by major feature films, most notably former East German director Helke Misselwitz's *Herzsprung*, followed closely by Wim Wenders' *Far Away, So Close* (1993), and Margarethe von Trotta's *Das Versprechen* (*The Promise*, 1994).
4. Ophüls in *L'Avant-scène du Cinéma* 127/128 (July-September, 1972), 10.
5. See Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 200-237.
6. See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), esp. 33, 67, 73, 209-215, 219-222.
7. Ophüls publicly admitted in the early 1970s that there is an element of exploitation in all film-making, and of con game in his manner of interviewing in specific. See "A Discussion with Marcel Ophüls," *Filmmaker's Newsletter* 6 (December 1972).
8. In the same interview, Brecht-Schall asserts that she will not clean the Nazi graffiti off her father's gravestone, which Ophüls then shows us. It reads, "Sau Jüd raus!" (Jewish pig, get out!)—which can be taken to refer more directly to, say, Ophüls himself than to any of the Brechts.
9. Cited in Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, second ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 245. On the film see further James Roy MacBean, "*The Sorrow and the Pity*: France and Her Political Myths," in *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 471-479.
10. *Le Monde*, August 18, 1981.
11. At this point Richard M. Barsam asks a pointed question: "Does this song damn Chevalier and, through extension, the French, for avoiding reality? Or is it just another piece of wartime footage reminding us that history is a complex mosaic? Ophüls asks audiences to think for themselves about how others behaved, about how they might behave in the face of a great human challenge." Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, revised and expanded ed. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1992), 348.
12. Insdorf first called attention to this audiovisual counterpoint in *Indelible Shadows*, 245.
13. Since in principle virtually anything can be recorded, the constitutive postmodern illusion is also produced that the historical record we access is not merely permanent but total and self-sufficient. For a major analysis of this aspect of postmodernity, among others, see Fredric Jameson,

Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

14. *The Times*, November 11, 1990.
15. Ophüls to Jackson, "Just Singin' round the Wall."
16. Hillel Tryster, "Friends, Romans—and Stasi," *The Jerusalem Post*, July 22, 1991.
17. Sheridan Morley, "Too Polite by Half," *The Times*, November 12, 1990.
18. See: Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); several essays in the anthology *Sound Theory Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992); *The Cinema Book*, ed. Pam Cook (London: BFI, 1992), "The Musical," 106-112; Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
19. Films alluded to by Ophüls in *November Days*' mini-history of cinema include: various "documentaries" about "everyday life" in Berlin, including *Menschen am Sonntag* (written by Billy Wilder, co-directed by Robert Siodmak and Edgar Ulmer, with Fred Zinnemann, 1929); Joseph von Sternberg, *The Blue Angel* (1930); Ernst Lubitsch, *To Be or Not to Be* (1942); and Joseph Mankiewiecz, *Julius Caesar* (1953). Noteworthy is Ophüls' tacit allusion to significant filmmakers with émigré status: that is, to more or less prodigal insider/outsiders.
20. Ophüls normally avoids the designation "documentary" and earlier calls *The Memory of Justice* "nonfiction." He is not alone in making this specification. Thus Vietnamese filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha has said that "I never think of my films as specifically documentary or fictional, except when I send them off to festivals." Trinh T. Minh-ha, "From a Hybrid Place" [interview with Judith Mayne, 1990], in her *Framer Framed* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 139. Bill Nichols notes that "documentary practices" are not merely in the mind of the beholder but are "strictly governed and institutionally bound and determined." Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts of Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 14-15.
21. The relation in documentary between narrative voice-over and sound/image track is clarified by Bill Nichols. "Whereas the appearance of a narrator speaking in direct address almost invariably ruptures the diegesis of fictional narrative, it can *constitute* the 'diegesis' of documentary exposition. Hence, the 'diegesis' cannot be ruptured by the narrator's presence, although it sometimes can be by his absence, by the lack of a logical principle ordering the whole which the narrator usually makes manifest." Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 184. Thus, throughout *November Days*, Ophüls can be felt to be present in his very absence at certain moments, even while generally shunning overt voice-over. On the problematic presence in documentary films of *bodies*, including the filmmaker/narrator's, see Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 229-266.
22. Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills" [1970], in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. with an introduction by Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 320.
23. See Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 1:570-611.
24. *Time*, December 28, 1992, 73.
25. On this film, see Judith Mayne, "Female Narration, Women's Cinema: Helke Sanders' *The All-Round Reduced Personality/Redupers*" [1981/82], in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 380-394; and B. Ruby Rich, "She Says, He Says: The Power of the Narrator in Modernist Film Politics" [1983], in *Gender and German Cinema: Feminist Interventions*, vol. 1: *Gender and Representation in New German Cinema*, ed. Sandra Frieden, et al. (Providence, RI: Berg, 1993), 143-162.
26. Cf. Jackson, "Just Singin' round the Wall."
27. In *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero*, Godard's camera captures the Berlin cigarette advertisement "Test the West," with a leather-clad "sexy" woman who entices the viewer to "smoke" (i.e., to buy and buy into) not merely a brand (West) but an entire economic system (the West).
28. On the importance of this film both in film history and in Dietrich's career, see *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, ed. Wolfgang Jacobsen, Anton Kaes, Hans Helmut Prinzler (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1993), 95-98.
29. See Flinn, *Strains of Utopia*, esp. 13-17, 24-34, 65-68, 86-87.
30. *The Cinema Book*, 112.
31. For a semiotic analysis of the deep anxieties about currency reform that are engraved in the German psyche, particularly as they resurfaced in 1990, see Wolfgang W. Fuchs and Berthold Franke, "Decoding the D-Mark," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 8:1/2 (1991), 87-99.
32. Think, for example, of the grotesque, ostentatious depiction of money at the end of Frank Capra's *Its a Wonderful Life* (1946), as noted by Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 179-215.
33. For data about the role that media played in transmitting the events both before, during and after the "Wende" and a critique, see *After the Wall: Broadcasting in Germany*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Tana Wollen (London: BFI, 1991).
34. As Stephen Brockmann has noted, "The mere change from the definite to the indefinite article implied the move from a revolution based on democratic principles to a revolution based on ethnic togetherness, a shift from *demos* to *ethnos*." Brockmann, "Introduction: The Reunification Debate," special issue on "German Unification," *New German Critique* 52 (Winter 1991), 3-30; here 6.
35. Michael Hoffman, "The Unity Train," in *After the Wall*, 66.
36. See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981). For an attempt to develop these terms for film theory and criticism, see my "The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki's *Images of the World and Inscriptions of War*," *New German Critique* 68 (Spring 1996), 165-192.

37. It is a Hegelian commonplace of film history, criticism, and theory that an initial representational and narrative mode of response is followed eventually by a more experimental mode which must logically be followed by the need for synthesis. Thus, in feminist film criticism, Laura Mulvey's seminal critique of visual pleasure in Classical Hollywood Cinema ("Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 1975), with its call for experimental alternatives, is in turn critiqued today for its ascetic, elitist austerity, and confronted with the demand to produce films and responses that include, alongside continued criticism of patriarchy and capitalism, what filmmaker Danièle Huillet calls "sensuality and pleasure [*Lust*]," and critic Gertrud Koch, explicitly critiquing Mulvey, calls a certain return to the "mimetic." Huillet, "Das Feuer im Innern des Berges" [interview with Helge Heberle and Monika Funke Stern], *Frauen und Film* 32 (June 1992), 12; and Koch, "Exchanging the Gaze: Revisioning Feminist Film Theory," *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985), esp. 144-148. Ophüls' response to the fall of the Wall clearly participates in this general tendency of film history.
38. See Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 379-420.
39. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* [1974], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 285.
40. In *The Sorrow and the Pity* Ophüls employed a different, but a similarly complex reference to "The International."
41. See Teresa De Lauretis's elaboration of Gombrich's argument in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 60-62.



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Hate (La Haine)

Writer/director: Mathieu Kassovitz. Producer: Christophe Rossignon. Cinematographer: Pierre Aim. Editor: Kassovitz, Scott Stevenson. Gramercy Pictures.

Its severe title, street-wise dialogue, tough urban setting, "rough" camerawork, and grainy black-and-white newsreel-style give *Hate* a visceral urgency. An opening montage of angry clashes between riot police and protesters sets a confrontational tone that resonates throughout a crucial day in the lives of three teenagers from a housing project on the outskirts of Paris. While latent and overt violence, police surveillance, brutality, and TV reports of street-fighting ensure that Mathieu Kassovitz's second directorial feature after *Café au lait* (1994) lives up to its in-your-face title, *Hate* is more than an enraged indictment of urban savageries. It is an eloquent and sophisticated film full of humor and irony captured within a decidedly tragic framework. And it introduces us to aspects of urban France not readily available in French films.

Kassovitz draws his characters from a cross section of young men (*Hate*'s point of view is distinctly masculine in its characters and their language). Today's suburban Parisian youth thrive on Anglo-American rap, reggae, and rock music, incorporate American and African fashion into their dress code, and spray-paint New-York-style graffiti on walls and bridges. At the same time, the immigrants among them are expected to assimilate in a country where 15 percent of voters back the National Front, the extreme right-wing political party whose xenophobic, reactionary platform advocates, among other things, repatriating all immigrants. *Hate* shows French society up against serious problems: suburban ghettos rocked by menacing bouts of vandalism and battles with the police; gang activity; and a dramatic growth in drug activity and unemployment. It is clear that Kassovitz intends that *Hate* not only investigate but also attempt to come to grips with the social tensions tearing at working-class suburbs or *banlieues* (the equivalent of America's inner cities) of France's big cities. Based on actual confrontations between the police and youth,[1] Kassovitz's portrayal of 24 hours in the lives of three young men had such a strong impact that the Minister of the Interior and the Prime Minister watched the film three times in a private screening in order to try to understand the causes underlying the riots that wreaked havoc in a number of Parisian suburbs in July, 1995.

The movie is set in ZAC de la Noé in Chantloup-les-Vignes, a high-rise estate in the suburbs of Paris inhabited by working-class French and immigrant families. The story focuses on three youths—Saïd, of Arab descent; Hubert, of African origin; and Vinz, a Jew (played by Saïd Taghmaouï, Hubert Koundé, and Vincent Cassel respectively). The action takes place during the aftermath of an all-night running battle between youths and the C.R.S. (Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité—the French riot police) sparked by the police beating of Abdel, a local teenager. The next day, Vinz reveals to his friends that he has found a loaded gun lost by one of the riot police. The film goes on to show the three young men in arguments with TV reporters, confrontations with undercover cops, dealings with drug pushers, arrests by the police, and fights with young skinheads from the National Front. Throughout, the location of the weapon, whether it be in Vinz's hiding place or on his person, adds to the tension as the director introduces each segment of the film with exact time and a ticking clock that propel us remorselessly toward the harrowing conclusion.

Hate oscillates between calm and storm. Before the film titles appear on the screen, a lone youth yells "assassins" at a squadron of riot police. We cut to a Technicolor image of Earth viewed from space. A petrol bomb hurled at the planet explodes, setting the screen ablaze. Orange fire dissolves into black-and-white footage of street fighting where police chase rioters, hordes of young and old loot stores, and a youth tosses a Molotov cocktail into an abandoned city bus. As the bus bursts into flames, we hear the voice of a news reporter summarizing the previous evening's street battles. The program returns to the studio, and, as she is finishing her report, the screen goes blank, as if someone had abruptly unplugged the television set.

The role of the media in depicting calm and storm reverberates throughout the film as trouble brews persistently beneath a surface quiet. Police break up a gathering of adolescents on the roof of an apartment building. Later, police sirens go off as Abdel's brother shoots at the police. The latter overpower him but find themselves surrounded by angry youths hurling vitriolic insults and kicking and punching at any cop in range. One undercover agent in a Notre Dame Fighting Irish jacket recognizes Vinz from the disturbance

on the roof. The two exchange angry words, before charging riot police break up the altercation, sending kids scattering in all directions.

In another scene, rays of watery afternoon sunshine, kids in the playground, and older women shuffling toward the stores evoke a disquieting normality. However, this peacefulness is shattered by a young disc jockey. With two enormous speakers placed in the window of his fifth or sixth-story apartment, he mixes and samples Edith Piaf singing "I have no regrets" and "Police," a powerful anthem by the French rap group Supreme NTM—sung in French with a chorus that includes the English line "Fuck the police." What is startling here and throughout *Hate* is the intensity of the violence that lurks ominously in certain peaceful scenes and erupts in others.

In the center of Paris, Hubert and Saïd are arrested for causing a disturbance in the entranceway of an upscale apartment building. Vinz, who is also with them, escapes. After very rough treatment at the hands of the police, Saïd and Hubert race to the subway station but miss their last train. Vinz is waiting for them on the platform. Penniless, they try to hot-wire a car, but are interrupted by a drunk, who gives them advice on which wires to join, offers to drive, and finally prevents a police car from catching them. However, a gang of skinheads shows up and overwhelms Saïd and Hubert, who have gone on ahead of Vinz. But the skins run for their lives when Vinz fires the gun in the air. He takes one of the skinheads prisoner and rams the muzzle of the gun into his prisoner's face. Hubert, who throughout the day has been angry at Vinz for carrying the weapon, screams sarcastically at him to go ahead and do the skin. "The only good skin is a dead skin," he shouts, but Vinz does not pull the trigger. He retches, the skinhead runs, and a collective sigh of relief is breathed.

By dawn they reach home. In the shadow of the high-rise apartments, Hubert bids his friends goodbye, and Vinz hands him the revolver, acknowledging that he does not have it in himself to use it. They smile at each other and turn; Vinz and Saïd head one way and Hubert the other. As Saïd and Vinz walk toward their building, an unmarked police car screeches to a halt in front of them. Out jumps the undercover agent in the Notre Dame jacket. He slams Vinz into the side of the car and points a gun at his head; it goes off, and Vinz crumples to the floor. Hubert returns brandishing the weapon Vinz had just given him. The cop and the youth stare each other down; the frame is a close-up of the desperate look on Saïd's face. The picture goes black. We hear the sound of gunfire.

In this rollercoaster fashion, *Hate* covers much terrain. It interweaves root causes of social and political unrest in France today: immigration, racism, exclusion, poverty, crime, and violence. The three main characters present a triptych of some of France's racial minorities: Arab, African, Jew. Despite the turmoil and racism around them, and forces within their own groups that would separate them, they stick together. This solidarity and their profanity-laced compassion contrast starkly with their position vis-à-vis the rest of society. As spectators, we get close to these youths, and are maneuvered out of our passive voyeur position into a kind of participatory association with the characters and their milieu. The camerawork makes us feel as if we are holding the camcorder for a documentary report or a cinéma vérité study of youth. *Hate* makes visible a part of Paris which has not been seen before.

In keeping with the film's mood, the three main characters have a symbiotic relationship with violence. Saïd is a street-smart, small-time drug pusher. He is slightly built and not very tall. However, he compensates for his lack of physical stature with a viciously lashing turn of phrase. Wild and virulent expressions roll off his tongue. "Don't be a motherfucker, give me a break," is indicative of Saïd's ferocious language. Other expressions reveal the distinctly cruel and powerful nature of his poetic. "Ça t'arracherait les poils du cul de dire bonjour?" for example, is scatalogically lyrical. It means something like, "Would it kill you to say hello?" However, such a flat translation undercuts a literal one: "Would it tear the hairs out of your ass to say hello?"

By contrast, Vinz, whose short hair makes him look like a skinhead, has an imposing, wiry physique. He tries to speak through his actions rather than his words. He participates in the rioting, and sees himself as "one of the last guerrillas of the urban jungle." Saïd qualifies his exploits otherwise: "You mean one of the projects' last assholes."[2] Unperturbed, Vinz recounts how Saïd and Hubert should have seen them face down the "pigs." His violent outlook pervades the atmosphere of the apartment where he lives with his grandmother, mother, and sister. At the breakfast table, his grandmother reproaches those who set fire to the school during the night. According to her, they begin by burning schools and end up no longer going to temple. She clearly implies that Vinz, who has neglected religious practice, is implicated in the previous night's destruction.

Vinz's and Saïd's aggressive and inflammatory responses to their alienation from society are tempered by somewhat ambiguous and deflating returns to the

realities of daily life. Despite his venomous berating of his grandmother, Vinz goes food-shopping at her request. When the grocer refuses to give him any credit, Vinz is forced to buy red rather than green bell peppers, and in language typical of a gangster, worries, "I am going to get assassinated by my grandmother, she doesn't like red ones."

Hubert has a calmer approach to life than his two friends. He has worked with local authorities to get a disused supermarket building transformed into a boxing gym. Unhappily, it too is destroyed in the riot. For all his upright qualities, however, Hubert also makes money from drugs. He quietly picks up money from his clients as the three friends wind their way around the housing complex. At home, Hubert tries unsuccessfully to help his ten-year-old sister with her homework, then hands his money over to his mother to pay the electricity bill.

Selling drugs is a way of making money in a country where unemployment runs at 12.5 percent. Moreover, in the French suburbs, the rate is often twice as high as the national average and can reach 50 percent. Here, the underground economy of narcotics and petty theft becomes an outlet for young people with little or no future. However, the rising crime rate has led to governmental pledges of greater police surveillance. This increased police presence among a population of youths with no work and few prospects leads to potentially explosive situations. In his introduction to the scenario, Mathieu Kassovitz gives a balanced outline to a disturbingly typical daily scenario:

> When an officer on the beat gets insulted all day long by 10-year-olds, by evening he has only one thing on his mind: unwind, get even, be done with it all.
>
> When 16-year-olds are gratuitously smacked around by cops doing ID checks or bringing them in for questioning, then the kids have no reason to respect a uniform anymore.

In the film however, Kassovitz is clearly on the side of the youths (*Hate* carries a dedication to those who died while the film was in production). Their solidarity, friendship, and humor emerge in the face of violent exclusion. In their full-riot gear, the police resemble a group of jack-booted soldiers chasing exuberant young kids. By contrast, undercover agents decked out in scruffy jeans, bomber jackets, and stocking hats look like a group of rag-tag incompetents doing their best to imitate an American TV cop show. Their only redeeming qualities are embodied in Samir, a French-Arab cop who empathizes with the youths and genuinely cares for their well-being.

Although it may seem one-sided, one of the strengths of *Hate* is that it does not gloss over the harshness of life in the suburbs. Probably the biggest criticism that has been leveled at cinema focusing on France's racial minorities is that the filmmakers have trodden very warily in their examination of hybridity. Films depicting Arab immigrants or people of Arab descent, for example, have eliminated or at least toned down otherwise tough, abrasive, and authentically "Arab" elements in order to counter the negative stereotyping of mainstream media representations. Kassovitz, however, aims less to create an alternative image and more to gain an understanding of the production of images. Rather than create a positive image of three misunderstood and alienated young men, his film constantly returns to issues concerning image-making in cinema and television. On one level, *Hate*'s realistic setting, black-and-white film stock, and street dialogue, clothes, and situations present a part of society which viewers might otherwise have chosen to ignore. However, we also become aware that this documentary-style investigation is framed, formed, and deformed by other media realities.

Throughout the film, images of the riot flash on the screen. Saïd, Hubert, and Vinz enter a friend's apartment, and are transfixed at seeing themselves and their friends on TV. They also see themselves on TV at Hubert's home and on a camcorder stolen from the police. On the morning after the riot, a journalist drives by and stops to ask the boys some questions—without getting out of the car.

> REPORTER: Hello, I'm from the TV, can we have a word with you? Do you know about the policeman's gun lost in the projects? Do you know who found it? And what would you do with it?
> SAID: Do we look like troublemakers to you?
> REPORTER: I didn't mean that..
> HUBERT [*sincere*]: Why don't you get out of the car. This isn't a safari park.
> REPORTER: Well 'cos . . . because we're late and we've lots of work to get through. [*The car speeds away*]

In a much later scene that same evening, Saïd, Hubert, and Vinz are in a deserted underground mall close to Les Halles subway station. As they descend the escalator, they see a wall of TV sets inside a shop window; the sets look out onto the exterior hallway.

(From left) Vincent Cassel, Saïd Taghmaouï, and Hubert Koundé

The mosaic of small screens creates one giant screen upon which they see the riot. They cannot hear the sound, the war in Bosnia is juxtaposed with the riot, and suddenly Abdel's face appears, with a caption indicating he has died. Saïd and Hubert immediately look around for Vinz, who had vowed to kill a cop should Abdel die. Meanwhile, we see Vinz with his Smith and Wesson aimed at a traffic cop writing up tickets. As the officer turns to face Vinz, a blast sends him flying through a shop window. However, as Hubert and Saïd race towards Vinz, we realize that he was posing, arms level hands firmly holding a revolver. He had imagined the shooting. His pose reminds us of an earlier scene, where, brushing his teeth in the bathroom, he aggressively addressed the mirror with, "Are you looking at me?" Vinz ended his *Taxi Driver*-style mirror ranting by shaping his hand into a revolver and blowing away his mirror-image.

Kassovitz's film does not labor the point of TV sound-bite editing and cinema influence. The collage of media reporting and Vinz's imagined reaction emerges among many references to cameras, cinema, video, and photo work which project and mold images of people, and out of which people mold images of themselves. We see the young people on the TV screen; video surveillance cameras show us Saïd, Hubert, and Vinz inside an expensive Parisian apartment building. Throughout the film, there are references to TV shows and films. One youngster recounts a gag from the previous night's "La Caméra Cachée" (the French version of "Candid Camera"). The poses struck by Hubert, Saïd, and Vinz and their descriptions of one another reverberate with television and film imagery. When the cops break up a rooftop gathering, Vinz insults the officer in the Notre Dame jacket with, "This mother who struts his ass like Clint Eastwood." During the hot wiring scene, they try to remember how MacGyver rigged cars.

Kassovitz does not try to answer the old question of whether art imitates life or vice-versa, he fore-

grounds the issue of image manipulation. Journalist Edgar Roskis exposed a very pertinent example of media manipulation, and one that certainly has a bearing on *Hate*. The front cover of the November 17, 1994, issue of *L'Express* featured a picture of a young woman dressed in a chador and the headline, "Head Scarf: The Conspiracy. How Islamists Infiltrate Our Society." Purportedly investigating the issue of head scarf-wearing among Muslim schoolgirls, the editors at this influential Parisian magazine had hired a model and made their own scenario. Professionally made-up and wearing full Islamic dress (rather than the simple head scarf that the girls had been expelled from school for wearing), the young woman sells her beautiful face to the conspiracy theory.

The question of the "Islamic threat" is far from being irrelevant to Kassovitz's film. The *banlieues* are alternately portrayed as forbidden cities or no-go areas where no right-minded member of French society would venture, or hotbeds of fundamentalist recruitment for terrorist schemes. Given the bomb attacks and riots of the past decade in France, one can readily understand how fear, finger-pointing, and general misunderstandings of the questions of immigration, poverty, housing, and social unrest become a web of misgivings and a veritable *impasse* over what should be done about the *banlieues*. Numerous journalists, TV reporters, and politicians are also quick to note—or deplore—the many similarities between urban blight on both sides of the Atlantic. At a press conference in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots of 1992, Jean Poperen, mayor of Meyzieu, a town bordering on the "hot spot" of Vaulx-en-Velin in the Lyons area, warned that France "is on the same downward slope as the United States."

Taking a stance while making a film about such issues often tends to mean making a case for the humanity of the minority groups who have become scapegoats. In this context, Kassovitz avoids the pitfall of cozily portraying misguided teenagers with hearts of gold under their tough outer shell. *Hate* remains surprising; the undercover squad car that appears at the end destroys the moment of reconciliation and self-awareness between Vinz and his friends, and the many opportunities to blow away the cops are but dreams for Vinz or fears for Hubert. For the spectator, these divergent representations are given an urgency through the dangerous, apocalyptic backdrop of urban riots. Armageddon lurks but is only partially unleashed. This apocalypse is disconcerting, funny, and tragic. In a toilet in Paris, Vinz and Hubert vehemently ignore each other as Saïd tries to reconcile them. A diminutive man exits his stall and as he washes his hands, tells the tragicomic story of a group of prisoners trying to relieve themselves while being transported across the Siberian steppes in a cattle truck. His disturbing tale interrupts the feud; the youths leave the bathroom wondering why the little man told them the story.

Our own sense of being faced with dangerous situations is heightened by the booby-trapped scenario. Just when it seems that the story-line will unfold conventionally, something happens to send it in a different direction. Thus the comic interrupts the tragic, riotous laughter goes hand-in-hand with deep sadness, and highly profane and misogynist language echoes a lyrical but disturbing ordinariness. *Hate*, then, is not an easy film to watch, nor is it an easy one to listen to in the original French nor in the fairly accurate subtitles. The film's original title was "Jusqu'ici tout va bien," or "so far so good." This expression comes from a tale in which a man falls from a 50-story building. As he passes the windows on each floor, the people inside can hear him saying, "so far so good, so far so good." As Kassovitz implies in his film, and as one of the characters says, despite the escalating social crisis, so far nothing has really happened, though things look bad. But it is not the fall that hurts, it's the landing. In the words of Tahar Ben Jelloun, a Moroccan writer living in France, "For the rest of society with its diffused fears, the suburbs' troubling present is the disturbing, anxiety-ridden future."

Since he wanted to engage as many people as possible in debate, Kassovitz set himself a campaign-like public relations agenda, promoting the film and its themes in as many ways as possible. *Hate* was widely distributed in 1995, and was included in many summer film series. The film's scenario was published in a book that included photographs by Gilles Favier, a photojournalist for *L'Equipe*, *Libération*, and *Paris-Match*, who creates alternatives to the stereotypical images of the suburbs: riots, burnt-out automobiles, smashed windows, and general latent aggression; his photos are of ordinary scenes: a black youngster bringing a baguette home; youths posing for the camera; and shots from the filming which convey a sense of staged, media-tweaked violence. And the director organized an exhibition of stills from the film and other photographs by Favier. The exhibition was unique in that there were multiple copies of photographs on display and visitors were encouraged to take away with them as many free copies as they wanted. There were also writing and photography workshops for young people and youth workers (con-

ducted on several occasions by Kassovitz and Favier themselves). Kassovitz also invited ten of France's rap performers, including three who had not yet released an album, to record a song inspired by the film. The songs were interspersed with dialogue from *Hate*. As well as these forums for examining *banlieue* and immigrant issues, the film has spawned others: Virgin has a *Hate* home page on the World Wide Web; *Libération* includes photographs of the film at its website and a discussion page in which people offer their views on the film and the issues it addresses.

Despite all his efforts, however, Kassovitz is not without his critics. Jean-Louis Richet, a young French director, for example, views Kassovitz as exploiting a world he has not experienced. In an interview broadcast on National Public Radio in the U.S.A., Richet said, "The problem is that films about the suburbs should be made by the people who live there." (According to Richet, who lives on a low-income housing estate, Kassovitz may be well intentioned, but Richet likens *Hate* to science fiction. On the other hand, *Etats des lieux,* Richet's film about youths in the suburbs cost a fraction of Kassovitz's, and Richet can claim a great deal of authenticity, given that he still lives in the *banlieue*).

Nevertheless, *Hate* gives an alternative perspective on changes in France's self-image. The news media, which always chases what is new, does not have the time or space to cover events in depth. Documentaries, on the other hand, have the time and space, but remain fact-based. The feature film has both time and space and freedom of narrative and character-building to weave incompatible strands of thought into a provocative tapestry. *Hate* allows us to ask if the divergent elements in the *banlieue* debate can fit together.

Although it begins with a riot, what *Hate* uncovers is much more inspiring. We see dreams, love, and determination hidden behind violent images. Moreover, the portrayal helps to cast significant issues about France in a different light. Rather than being at the margins of French society, the suburbs become a lens through which France can look at herself. Thus, Kassovitz's self-reflective and penetrating study of social crisis places him squarely within cinema's observational, reflective, and refractive tradition. By paying close attention to the importance of imagery, how it emanates from French and American media sources, and how it is adopted, adapted, or rejected by French youth, Kassovitz uncovers a complex arsenal of self-expression which cannot be reduced to a partisan debate over French versus American culture, the youth of today against some kind of traditional French paradigm, or insider versus outsider versions of life. The teenagers portrayed in the film, like the film itself, belong to a hybrid, heterogeneous, contrapuntal cultural mix which repeatedly tears apart and patches back together the discordant soul of the people of France.

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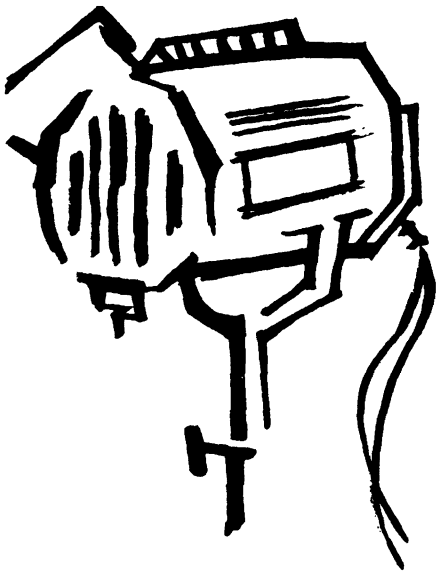
Notes

1. In the introduction to the scenario, Kassovitz gives a brief account of a young man named Makome, who was apparently beaten to death while in police custody. Some of the signs held up by rioters/protesters in *Hate*'s opening montage bear the words "Revanche pour Mako"; Kassovitz weaves these scenes, probably taken by a TV reporting crew, with his own staged riot scenes. In an interview in 1995, Kassovitz said that the death of Makome M'Bowole in 1993 inspired much of the hatred in *Hate*. Kassovitz contrasts the violence in Los Angeles following the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King to the absence of reaction to the death of the young Zairian killed in a Parisian police station. His film in some ways is an attempt to fill that void. Moreover, his dedication of *Hate* to "those who died while this film was being made" is his way of rendering this particular incident emblematic of the deaths of other youths in police custody or in confrontations with law enforcement. There have been a number of such incidents.
2. Gilles Favier, Mathieu Kassovitz, *Jusqu'ici tout va bien: Scénario et photographie autour du film LA HAINE* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1995), p. 22. The quotations are generally taken from this published script and the translations are mine.



Underground

Director: Emir Kusturica. Screenplay: Dusan Kovacevic and Kusturica. Executive Producer: Pierre Spengler. Cinematographer: Vilko Filac. Editor: Branka Ceperac. Music: Goran Bregovic. Globe Film Co./ Ciby 2000.

Up until *Underground* (1995), the films of Yugoslavian director Emir Kusturica are all about growing up, about rites of passage, and initiation. This is not to say they are about adolescent infatuation or sexual awakening; instead, they are concerned with initiation as a process, the unfolding of the cosmic mystery and the transformation of boy into man. Such initiations are seen through growing up in Sarajevo (*Do You Remember Dolly Bell,* 1981), childhood under totalitarianism (*When Father Was Away on Business,* 1985), the deadly games of a gypsy boy (*Time of the Gypsies,* 1989), and the impossibility of loving a mother and a daughter equally at the same time—an impossibility from which it's easier to escape to the world of dreams (*Arizona Dreams,* 1993).

But with *Underground*, Kusturica has grown older. As if to illustrate the point, the film opens with a flying fish being served to a burly, black-mustached Balkan. The fish, a memorable icon of freedom in Kusturica's *Arizona Dreams*, suddenly comes to life and jumps off the plate, only to be casually shot dead and eaten, accompanied by a fine wine. It is a shocking visual image, but it merely flashes upon the screen and disappears. For Kusturica, childhood is brutal and finished off quickly. Yet if growing up implies the death of the past, there is one area in which Kusturica refuses to grow up. He refuses to believe that his homeland, the country formerly called Yugoslavia, no longer exists. *Underground* was represented at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival not by Bosnia or Yugoslavia, but by the European Council. This choice (Kusturica's own) signified not a recognition of a new and unified Europe, but a boyish refusal to bury an old and fragmented Europe.

Underground was advertised as a history of a country that had ceased to be—the film's subtitle, incidentally, is *Once There Was a Country.* Recounting the history of a country that doesn't exist, the film spans 50 years, from World War II, postwar reconstruction, and the corruption of Tito's regime up to the current Balkan war. The film concentrates on the destruction of friendship and mutual betrayal between two patriotic Serb-speaking gangsters, Marco and Blacky, who begin as revolutionaries and evolve into guerrilla partisans, directing their black-market operations from an underground cellar before their paths separate and they enter upon a series of betrayals. *Underground* blends the history of the country with the events of its main characters' lives. The two spheres have a surprising amount in common, a situation which Kusturica reinforces through authentic-looking but doctored news footage of Marco appearing with Yugoslav President Tito and other world figures.

Underground won three prizes, including the prestigious Palme d'Or for Best Picture, at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival. Kusturica's work was called "a brilliant and ambitious film filled with the kind of teeming human images that one usually associates with Fellini." (Damian Cannon, "*Underground,*" *Empire*, no. 4, 1996) Another Western critic, Deborah Young, said, "If Fellini had shot a war movie, it might resemble *Underground.*" (*Variety*, May 30, 1995) In Russia, *Underground* was called the triumph of the decade. Nevertheless, the film also sparked a firestorm of controversy. Some critics at Cannes thought that it exploited notions of vitality and brutality, which had already lost all potential appeal in the light of the bloody and tragic war in Yugoslavia. And *Underground* got a cold reception from Bosnian critics, who described the film as weak and claimed that Kusturica, who is a Bosnian Muslim by birth, won the prize merely because the film was about war. There were even widespread accusations by Bosnians and enthusiastic French critics that the film was pro-Serb because of the choice of location (Belgrade) and the focus on Serbian characters and their portrayal as revolutionaries or victims of war whose violence only adds to their irresistibility and charm. This was compounded by the fact that the film's world premiere at Cannes was attended by the Serbian secret police chief, flanked by a celebrated war criminal named Arkan (the Rambo of the Balkans). Bosnian critic Stanko Cerovic's newspaper review ("Canned Lies: Yellow Press Heroes," *Bosnia Report*, August, 1995) was scathing:

> Kusturica's reconstruction of history has nothing to do with reality, unless you accept the theories of Serb nationalists; which these days even in Belgrade tend to be confined to the yellow press. . . . His latest film shows real impotence masked by a fireworks display of noise, color and meaningless scenes. . . . In

> this beautiful and wealthy city, the representatives and favorites of a criminal regime came together with the Western Elite to act out a scenario based on manipulation, stupidity and cowardice. Applauding themselves, their congratulatory phrases were full of humanism, art and love, while in Bosnia—precisely in the name of this false theater—hundreds of innocent people continue to be killed. Western soldiers continue to be humiliated, while Serbia (which Kusturica is defending) is dying in the arms of Slobodan Milosevic and the Serb extremists whom he created and has taught to butcher.

Among the Bosnians of Sarajevo, Kusturica has also been accused of treason for moving to Paris and failing to identify himself with the war-time government of Alia Izetbegovic.

Upset by the failure of the film in his own country, Kusturica re-edited it numerous times and finally claimed he was going to quit filmmaking. (Fortunately, he soon retracted that statement and has now just completed a new film—*Cat Black, Cat White*.) Although most foreign critics treated the film primarily as a political piece, Kusturica associated himself with neither the Muslim nor the Serb tradition in *Underground*. The film reads like the director's own personal repentance and lament for Yugoslavia. However, *Underground* is more than just a political film.

The film can be seen as three separate stories, differing in theme and style: the World War II period, Tito's regime, and the present day (called "The War"). The separations are accurate and useful, if one sees the picture merely as a political allegory or character study. However, *Underground* operates on several levels of interlocking complexity ranging from the political to the psychological. One of the film's most interesting relationships is between its depiction of political ideology and the subconscious aspect of such ideologies/regimes. Kusturica examines the human desire for political power and weaves a complex tapestry in which the film acts as a psychoanalysis of the political regime that grows out of the subconscious sphere. This is not the first time the subconscious has come to the foreground in Kusturica's work. The final scene of *When Father Was Away on Business* delves into the sphere of imagination. In *Time of the Gypsies,* Kusturica goes even deeper into the sphere of dreams and the subconscious. The director is proud of how naturally and organically such a journey/transition was made in *Underground*: "I did what I wanted, I shot every scene on the edge of consciousness, and the transition to the episodes where there are sounds from the other worlds are made smoothly and look like a continuation of reality."

History in Kusturica's films does not reflect objective or factual accounts of historical development; rather, historical movement is represented by the sphere of the collective unconscious, even when it is contained where it should be—under ground. The "heroes" of *Underground*—Blacky and Marco—do not merely use the subconscious; they are symbols of it. Marco Dren is a man from the underground—a word that has multiple meanings in the film. Literally, it is a fictional cellar where these heroes are hiding. It also has a revolutionary meaning, as "resistance," as well as a psychological meaning, where it functions as a synonym for the collective unconscious. (Through Marco, the collective unconscious attempts to politically rule the country and its historical development: Marco becomes an arms dealer and Tito's right-hand man after the war, thereby gaining immense power.)

From the opening sequence, the subconscious is not personified by any one individual; it flows from the images juxtaposed before us. The German bombardment of Belgrade in 1941, signifying the beginning of the war, is devastating the city. At the zoo, where Marco's brother Ivan works, a horde of animals—tigers, chimpanzees, elephants, zebras—liberated from their cages walk among the ruins, symbolizing the free, unfettered impulses of the collective unconscious.

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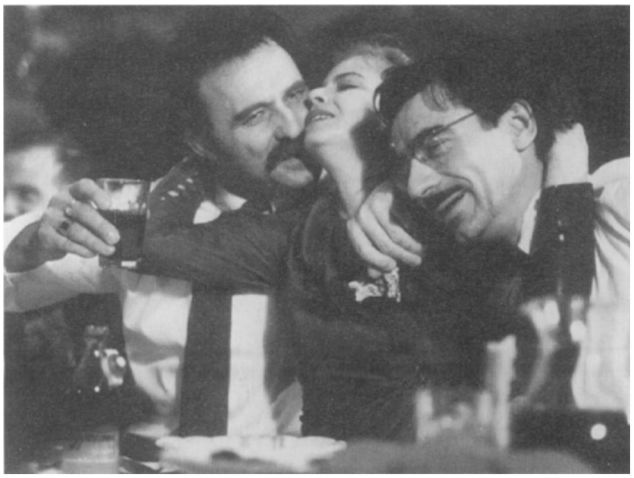
Underground: "Liberated" animals

Several years after the bombing, Marco and Blacky, pursued by the Gestapo, hide their families in Marco's grandfather's cellar, where they have put together an underground munitions factory. The hidden community has fashioned its own underground world and Marco is its only link to the outside world while they make weapons for the revolution. Although Blacky is married, he has decided to daringly snatch his object of desire, the actress Natalija, from under the nose of her German admirer, Franz, during a performance at the National Theater. Marco and Blacky make their way to the theater without trouble and Blacky strides onto the stage to shoot Franz in front of the horrified audience. Then, grasping Natalija, he makes his escape.

Blacky and Natalija arrange to be married on a boat moored outside of Belgrade. A great party ensues while everyone waits for the priest. Unfortunately, the cleric never comes, but Franz, who has survived the shooting, does—with a phalanx of soldiers. After a short battle, Natalija runs to her German lover. Blacky is captured and Marco escapes. Hideous torture ensues for Blacky, yet he never cracks. Marco stages a rescue; Blacky is returned to the cellar commune to recover, and Marco and Natalija remain above ground. While Blacky recuperates in the cellar, Marco seduces Natalija. She is a survivor who switches allegiance among the three men according to their degree of power and protection.

As Allied bombers destroy what the Nazis have left of Belgrade, Marco completes his betrayal of Blacky and the resistance, making the refugees in the cellar believe that the war is still going on. Fast forward to 1961: Marco is now an important advisor to Tito and a war hero—and married to Natalija. He unveils a statue of Blacky and says a few words in praise of his "late" friend. A filmed dramatization of Marco's and Blacky's war exploits, primarily as propaganda for Communist Yugoslavia, is under way. Blacky, of course, is still alive in the cellar complex with a group of survivors that has grown in number. A subterranean society has developed over the intervening years, which embraces births, marriages, and deaths as well as weapons production for the war believed to be still raging outside. Marco and Natalija perpetuate this myth so they can sell and profit from the arms produced down below. Matters come to a head when the guilty duo attend the wedding reception for Jovan, Blacky's son, in the cellar. As a drunk Natalija considers revealing all to Blacky, it is revealed that he and Jovan have already planned to leave the hideout on a surprise raid.



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Blacky (Lazar Ristovski), Natalija (Mirjana Jokovic), and Marco (Miki Manojlovic)

As Yugoslavia begins to disintegrate after Tito's death, Marco finds it increasingly difficult to sustain the fiction of a Nazi-occupied Belgrade for Blacky and his friends, who are preparing themselves for a massive assault on the outside. When they finally emerge, Blacky and Jovan stumble across the film set. Convinced that the war is still going on, and enraged by the sight of (the actor playing) Franz, they launch an attack on actors and crew, killing "Franz."

The story continues in the present, when Blacky and the others have escaped the cellar through subterranean tunnels, only to emerge and find their country unrecognizable . . . and yet unchanged: bombs and bloodshed are everywhere. An aged Natalija and a crippled Marco are still dealing in arms (and drugs) with anyone willing to do business, but they meet a gruesome fate at the hands of a freedom fighter (who happens to be Blacky), dying in flames in a motorized wheelchair circling aimlesly and endlessly in the smoking ruins of wartorn village. Ivan, an innocent figure whose role is to carry the emotional toll of the war, reappears to learn the truth about Marco's treachery and the tragic fate of the country he knew as Yugoslavia.

In the final part of *Underground,* Kusturica focuses on the idea of Yugoslavia inhabiting parallel worlds by creating a network of underground tunnel—inhabited by Yugoslav warriors and refugees, and U.N. peacekeepers—linking Berlin with Bosnia and Croatia. One tunnel exits into a burning village—it is impossible to identify it as Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbian. Everyone has lost, until the film's Felliniesque final scene of a fantasy reconciliation in which all the film's characters, living and dead, celebrate a family-

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Celebrating union: The wedding

style reunion on a splinter of land that splits off from the mainland and floats gently away.

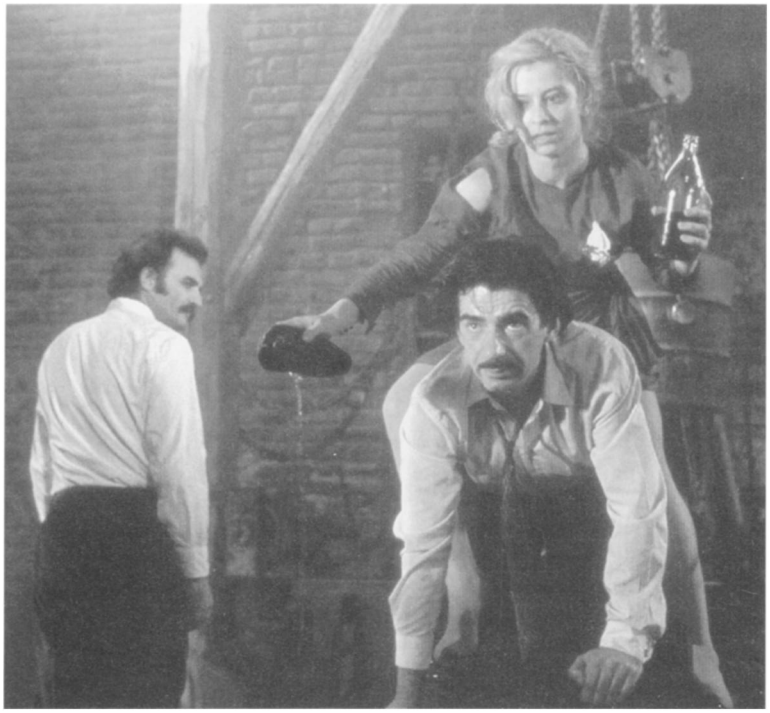
In Russia, *Underground* garnered a tremendous and favorable critical response. In a poll organized by the Russian magazine *Art of Cinema,* Kusturica and Quentin Tarantino were deemed the leaders in a list of directors of the twenty-first century, and a fantastic synthesis was created: "Quentin Kusturica." Kusturica was compared not only with Fellini but also with Dostoyevsky, especially his *Notes from Underground,* and with Tarkovsky. In interviews, Kusturica himself often compares his own works to these of Tarkovsky. Kusturica's films, like Tarkovsky's, are complex, multi-layered, and nonlinear, jumping back and forth in space and time, from objective to subjective visualizations. Though Kusturica and Tarkovsky come from similar cultures and points of view, in *Underground* Kusturica did what Tarkovsky was avoiding—he played the role of psychoanalyst, whose patient is not an individual, but a whole social system.

There is also a comparison to be made between *Underground* and Russian literary sources such as Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, and Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. The film's title, in fact, directly references Dostoevsky's work: unrestrained desire triumphs in both. The underground man in Dostoevsky's novella upholds this desire, this *wanting*, as the highest value. He "needs only independent wanting, whatever this independence may cost and wherever it may lead." For the underground man, "one's own free and voluntary wanting, one's own caprice, however wild, one's own fancy, though chafed sometimes to the point of madness—all this is that same . . . most profitable profit." Kusturica's heroes realize and achieve this most profitable profit, this independent wanting, giving themselves over to fancy—and that is how they derive happiness. As a result of their actions, blood streams like a river of champagne.

Josef de Maistre, the French philosopher who was ambassador to Russia in the early 18th century, said of the Russians: "Nobody can want as violently as the Russians want. . . . If you lock Russian desire in a prison, the prison will explode." (*Collected Works*, vol. VIII, p. 291) One can easily apply these words to Kusturica's heroes and to his film in general. Desire in Kusturica's film is sadistic by its very nature, but this sadism is not purely malevolent; it is not just a wanton desire to destroy. Rather, it is joyful, and connected with erotic pleasure, with libido. But *Underground* changes after the Regime emerges from the underground. Sadistic desire splits into libidinous and destructive elements, and Marco usurps its libidinous aspect. The embodiment of this usurption is that Natalija, the object of erotic desire (of both enemies and friends), becomes Marco's wife. But Marco betrays his role as the personification of erotic desire. He stands next to Tito; he gives speeches; he dedicates a monument to his "dead" comrade Blacky, and oversees the crew making the propaganda film about Blacky's wartime exploits. Here Marco belongs to the sacred heart of the Communist regime.

Natalija starts to complain about not having a child with Marco. His eros has been wasted on something else—politics. From reproach she turns to action: she tries to seduce him, but finds that he is unable to respond. Having realized his impotence, Marco leaves the political arena. The news of his exit from politics is followed by the ironic remark: "Having learned about it, Tito fell seriously ill, and in 20 years he died." Kusturica therefore dates the fall of the regime not by the moment when its leader passed away, but when the desire that drove the regime, having lost its vitality, faded.

It is Blacky who takes on the destructive aspect of desire—what Freud called mortido or Thanatos (desire for death), and it is juxtaposed with libido or Eros. Paradoxically, de Maistre's metaphor about desire imprisoned gets dramatically embodied in *Underground*: mortido is indeed in some sort of a prison. But the destructive desires of the Regime are never destroyed: mortido is stored in the underground, in the subconscious, and, deprived of the opportunity to realize itself, becomes frustrated. The inhabitants of the



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Party time: Blacky, Natalija, and Marco

underground keep their aggression keyed up by crying out toasts, singing revolutionary songs, producing guns. They even manage to construct a tank. And Blacky constantly tries to come back up to the surface. To him, the war is not over yet, the enemy is still roaming the country and Tito and his regime are still in danger.

De Maistre's metaphor is resolved just as its author had predicted: the tank destroys the underground, Blacky and his son Jovan emerge. The prison blows up and destructive desire is liberated. It happens almost simultaneously with the disappearance of Marco Dren, the personification of the libidinous aspect of desire.

Referring to Tarkovsky, Kusturica often spoke about the importance of the natural elements in his culture. Indeed, water becomes especially significant in the last scenes of *Underground*, when we see Blacky's drowned son, Jovan, reemerge from the water to join the rest of the film's characters (both alive and dead). We see Blacky's wife, Vera, who died while giving birth to Jovan in the beginning of the film, and Jovan's bride, who threw herself into a well. And lastly, on a spit of land that cuts deep into the waters, they begin a big party—the final act of all Russian folk tales. Films usually end with the words, "The End." In Kusturica film there is a title on black: "This story has no end." Indeed, if this story in truth represents the workings of the collective unconscious, then it can have no end.

Underground builds a metaphor for the entire Communist world. The film is set everywhere and nowhere, at no time and always. When I think about what type of film would effectively deal with the chaos in contemporary Russia, I think about *Underground*. But when Russians try to make films about the situation in the mid-90s, they come out with openly absurdist works like *Shirli-mirli* (*Nonsense*) or *The Hammer and the Sickle* (both 1996), or *Everything Will Be O.K.* (one of the biggest hits of last year, with a huge and very enthusiastic cast, and a score combining a balalaika group with *Porgy and Bess*), forgetting that even an absurdist plot follows some sort of logical order. Absurdity is the most difficult of styles, the one, ironically, demanding the greatest restraint and discipline. Kusturica often said that his films are closer to the circus or musical theater than they are to serious literature.

French film critic Gerard Lefort wrote in the left-wing Parisian newspaper *Liberation*: "It's a war film . . . or, rather, a film in the state of war, a film in occupation: the war is viewed as a rock-and-roll concert. It's the famous speech of Churchill ('I promised you blood and tears') sung to the Sex Pistols." Kusturica voluntarily takes up the comparison: "Have you ever been to the concerts of The Clash or, rather, The Sex Pistols, whom I unfortunately never saw on stage? They never stop, it's a catharsis with no beginning and no end. You know, I play in a rock group and that gives me the best sensations in life."

Underground is indeed a catharsis with no beginning and no end, from the burning zoo to the rift that separates the festive and phantom partygoers from their homeland; from the terrifying decorations of the underground tunnels to Tito's funeral and the famous song "Lili Marleen." The great flights of surreal imagery only serve to intensify the growing horror and sadness. The film is a lament, a song of violence and sadness. In his own way, the filmmaker has rendered a deeply significant service to the cause of reconciliation in a "country that ceased to be."

■ Marianna Yarovskaya is a former journalist for Russian State Television in Moscow. She is currently earning her MFA in Film Production at the USC School of Cinema and Television.

Book Reviews

African Experiences of Cinema

Edited by Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1996. $49.95 cloth; $24.95 paper.

This astute compilation brings together a number of important but previously scattered essays and documents as well as recently written or newly translated material. The latter in particular foreground some of the emergent agendas within current discussions of African cinema. Without marking an absolute break from earlier edited collections like Angela Martin's *African Cinema: The Context of Production* (1982) and Jim Pines and Paul Willemen's *Questions of Third Cinema* (1989), *African Experiences of Cinema* definitely stakes out new ground. The collection as a whole should prove to be an invaluable teaching aid, and as such might also help to encourage enterprising film and video distributors to improve the availability of back catalogue African films, many of which are difficult to obtain.

African cinema as an object of teaching and research within British and American academic institutions still receives far too little attention, and even established debates and areas of investigation are relatively under-researched, although the situation has been improving in recent years. This collection takes established debates as its starting-point (with eloquent statements of Third Cinema principles, for example, from filmmakers such as Med Hondo and Jean-Marie Téno), but also significantly shifts attention toward issues and areas as diverse as lusophone cinemas (one of the most under researched areas of all); the intersection and conflict between feminist and anti-colonial critique in African films; the widely acclaimed but less often critically analyzed work of perhaps the key figure from the second, "post-Sembene" generation of francophone filmmakers, Idrissa Ouedraogo.

By opening up a significant amount of space to African filmmakers and Africa-based theorists, critics, and historians, the collection also sidesteps the potential problems associated with processing African films and African film culture through theoretical paradigms developed within and sometimes largely confined to the Euro-American academic circuit. Consequently, the various contributors approach their topics from a variety of theoretical and cultural locations. Skilful editing of these contributions ensures that an implicit, structured sense of dialogue emerges across the book as a whole.

The choice of the word "experiences" in the collection's title signals the emphasis given to critical assessment of the actual history of African cinemas, rather than just to the aspirations of African cinema as an ideal yet to be fully realized. Infrastructural issues and their relationship to the question of audiences is one of the collection's recurring themes. This is a concern which, in one way or another, haunts all discussions of African cinema. Contributors address it from various standpoints: Rod Stoneman, for example, explores the possibility that certain trends in recent African film production may be related to the underlying constraints imposed by funding and distribution arrangements which presuppose European and American festival and art cinema circuits and minority television channel screenings as their primary target markets. One possible alternative to this polite cycle of dependency is articulated by Mweze Ngangura's assessment of the need to build a populist African entertainment cinema which builds upon current African audiences' aspirations and expectations, thereby lessening reliance upon foreign distribution. A glimpse of what one version of this cinema might be like is provided by his own work as director of films such as the musical comedy *La Vie est belle* (1987).

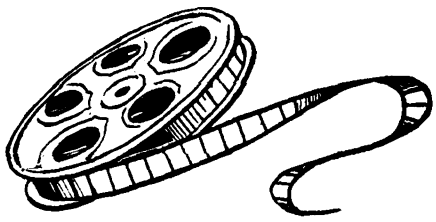
These contributions on the question of audiences indicate one of the limits which new discourses of African cinema have now reached. Mweze Ngangura's insightful discussion of the slippery dynamics of the popular, and his provocative anecdote about African audience reception of *Rambo*—and the need for an African equivalent!—points to the absence of more concrete, more extensive, and more methodologically sophisticated studies of, first, African audiences in Africa and, second, the reception of African films in Europe and America (as well as in other locations outside Africa). The earlier polemical and possibly utopian debates around the principles of an African version of a Third Cinema (very much in evidence, for example, in the 1975 Algiers Charter on African Cinema, yet another key document included in this collection) were, importantly, centered around certain notions of generating audience experiences which activated critical understanding and challenged neocolonial cultural domination. However, very little research has been done on whether historical audiences did in fact interact with films adhering to these principles in the manner envisaged by declarations such as those contained in the 1975 Charter.

African Experiences of Cinema's focus is of course governed by the availability of material in what is still a nascent but growing field of teaching and research. Feminist analyses of a diverse range of films by male directors feature quite prominently here, whilst at the same time implicitly highlighting the relative paucity of published material on the work of African women

filmmakers such as Safi Faye and Moufida Tlatli. Also unavoidably absent is any substantial discussion of the potential and implications of video and television (terrestrial and satellite) as current or possible future sites for the exhibition of African films within Africa. Haile Gerima's comments elsewhere on the underground video distribution of his *Harvest 3,000* (1974) in Ethiopia during the Mengistu era suggests another area which future research could usefully explore.[1]

One of the most interesting essays in the collection is Tunisian scriptwriter-director Nouri Bouzid's extensive discussion of the delicate conjunction of aesthetics and social and political concerns in his work. His essay exemplifies the continuing commitment of many African filmmakers to serious, engaged intellectual reflection upon the relationship between their practice and the larger social and cultural contexts within which it takes place; a tradition of commitment which gives the lie to the assumption that "theoretical" perspectives on African cinema are the sole preserve or prerogative of the Western academy. The range of specific issues Bouzid touches upon is too varied to do justice to here, but the remarkable developments within Tunisian film culture following the success of his *Man of Ashes* (1986) and the incredible popularity within Tunisia of films like Ferid Boughedir's *Halfaouine* (1990) raise questions which again illustrate how *African Experiences of Cinema* is a collection which repeatedly nudges up against the various limits of new discourses of African cinema.

The book's preface acknowledges that the collection as it stands is the trace of what was initially conceived of as a larger project, "eschewing the customary division of the continent into North Africa and "sub-Saharan Africa" (ix). By way of an apology for the relative absence of North African material, the editors state their conviction that "fundamentally, the many issues engaged in the documents, testimonies and essays in the book are by no means relevant only to film practices of sub-Saharan Africa." This conviction may well be correct, but it is surely an issue worthy of more extensive discussion, although to be fair, it is broached at one point later on in the collection, by Keyan Tomaselli's contribution, "'African' Cinema: Theoretical Perspectives on Some Unresolved Questions," which opens the Issues of Representation section. The question of where, in terms of cinematic spaces, Africa ends and the Arab world begins, and how they might productively overlap, is not only a theoretical one: it implicitly or explicitly informs the crucial decisions made and the alliances brokered by festival programmers, producers, and distributors.[2] For example, is the Tunisian experience of the emergence of a distinctive new auteur cinema which has resonated with popular audiences within Tunisia as well as art cinema audiences in Europe a model which could or should be adopted in other parts of Africa? Can stronger reciprocal production and distribution arrangements be fostered across the North/sub-Saharan African divide?



These are difficult and sometimes controversial questions which confront all those who are in any way involved with African cinema. *African Experiences of Cinema*'s sidelining of these questions is understandable given the range of other agendas the book is concerned to promote, and also given the fact that the one recent book which might have been expected to talk across this divide, Roy Armes and Lizbeth Malkmus's *Arab and African Filmmaking* (1993), is very much a work which falls into two distinct and separate halves. Nevertheless, *African Experiences of Cinema*'s generally impressive and varied selection of material consistently encourages speculation about the direction those experiences, and the critical debates which form part of them, might take in the future. The editors' judicious selection of what is available makes it a thought-provoking collection, adroitly positioned in relation to both established and emergent debates, yet also suggestive of potential future directions in African film scholarship. Will investigations into specific issues and areas continue to be, as they mostly are here, at least residually informed by adherence to a narrative of desired progress toward African liberation and unity, however these goals and the paths which lead to them are defined? Excepting North Africa, this collection effectively emphasizes the existence of a plurality of African experiences of cinema, simultaneously furthering older debates and opening onto future ones: is the co-existence within Africa of African populist entertainment films, auteur films, and productions which adhere to more familiar Fanonian "fighting notions of popularity" a sign of strength or of fragmentation; can the diverse range of different funding, distribution, and exhibition arrangements now in operation be seen as potential components of a viable Afrocentric cinematic infrastructure; will African women be able to open up more spaces for themselves as filmmakers, and will the gradual increase in feminist interventions into African film scholarship continue; can the experiences of both sub-Saharan

and North Africans, behind and in front of the screen, be effectively articulated together, and can links between lusophone, francophone, anglophone, diaspora, and South African cinemas be solidified? Given the dangers attendant upon fragmentation and disorganization, can the plurality to which this collection gives voice be sustained as a unity in difference which could potentially become one of the strongest and most positive aspects of future African experiences of cinema?

■ Martin Stollery is Lecturer in Film Studies at Southampton Institute in England.

Notes

1. Cited in Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Black African Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. 192.
2. For a recent discussion underlining the pertinence of this question, see Manthia Diawara, "Whose African Cinema Is It Anyway?" *Sight and Sound* [new series] vol. 3, no. 2 (February 1993), pp. 24-5.

German Cinema

Texts in Context

By Marc Silberman. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1995. $24.95.

Understanding Rainer Werner Fassbinder

Film as Private and Public Art

By Wallace Steadman Watson. Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 1996. $39.95.

Among recently published books on German cinema, the respective texts of Silberman and Watson stand out not only as useful for scholars specialized in German or Film Studies but also as accessible to a broader reading public seeking a contextual overview. While Silberman's book encompasses the history of German cinema from early Weimar Republic through the postwar division into East and West German national cinemas, Watson has undertaken a monograph of Fassbinder that synthesizes the plethora of interviews, biographical books, reviews, and critical essays that have accumulated since the artist's death in 1982.

Silberman identifies his project as diverging from other film history texts in that he does not purport to offer an objective history of the usual thematics of camera technique and innovation, the politicization of the cinematic apparatus in the Third Reich, and the development of a socially conscious film aesthetic in the 70s. Aligning himself with the project of Cultural Studies, he instead chooses to stress the (re)constructedness of the film document, its social context, and the historical spectator. Reading "texts in context," to borrow his own phrasing, means establishing a different relationship between the cinema and the real, one in which it is less a matter of establishing the verisimilitude of filmic representation of historical realities and more a question of exploring textual coherence as expressed through plot, character, setting, and narrational strategies. In other words, he shifts the focus from an exclusive interrogation of what a film means to how it produces meanings at specific historical junctures with spectators.

The book is subdivided into five sections: Weimar Cinema, the Third Reich, Early Postwar Cinema, East German Cinema, and the New German Cinema; and it includes close readings of films by Lubitsch, Murnau, Dudov and Brecht, Sierck, von Borsody, Käutner, Staudte, Deppe, Pabst, Wolf, Zschoche, Kluge, von Trotta, and Wenders. Even as the selection of films is intended to be paradigmatic, Silberman does not limit himself to the most canonical film; as a means to highlight the historical nature of reception, he has also included several that were popular at the time of their production but have since fallen into obscurity. However, even in a survey not intended to be exhaustive, the omission of feminist filmmakers seems surprising, given the significant contribution which the writings and films of Helke Sanders, Jutta Brückner, or Ulrike Ottinger, for example, have made not only to the New German Cinema but also to the development of feminist film theory in Western Europe and the U.S. Silberman does discuss Margarethe von Trotta's *Marianne und Juliane*, but she is generally understood among film historians as a more conventional artist not representative of the feminist strategies and aesthetics developed by other women filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s.

On the other hand, the author does cover a lacuna in reception of East German Cinema, delineating the continuities in DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) film production that reveal its geneaological development out of the former UFA (Universal Film-AG) system established in the 1930s which eventually became a vehicle for ideological manipulation under the Nazi regime. Not only does Silberman offer an overview of the aesthetic of socialist realism, he also offers insights into the subtle strategies of circumventing state censorship that were employed in later films of the 1970s, and

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On the other hand, the author does cover a lacuna in reception of East German Cinema, delineating the continuities in DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) film production that reveal its geneaological development out of the former UFA (Universal Film-AG) system established in the 1930s which eventually became a vehicle for ideological manipulation under the Nazi regime. Not only does Silberman offer an overview of the aesthetic of socialist realism, he also offers insights into the subtle strategies of circumventing state censorship that were employed in later films of the 1970s, and

herein contributes to the newly flourishing terrain of GDR film criticism. The author also brings to light some of the analogous developments in the cinema history of the two nations, pointing out that the "revolutionary romanticism" of East German films in the 50s found its parallel in the visual, acting, and musical style of the Heimat film in the Federal Republic. Further, the subtle strains of state resistance that can be decoded in films of the 70s in the German Democratic Republic similarly surface in the more overt social criticism prevailing in West Germany's New German Cinema.

While Silberman maintains that he wishes to foreground "the ideological nature of categories that define discourses" (x), at times one has the sense that his own employment of the terminology defining specifically filmic discourse today borders on the formulaic. The recurring references to an apparently generic spectator's "imaginary," for example, fail to acknowledge the complexity of this pseudo-psychoanalytic category as inflected by such vectors of identity as race, class, gender, age, etc. But perhaps this seeming weakness merely reveals the extent to which a specific discursive approach to film analysis internalized within academic circles now bears currency within a broader reading public, achieving a certain *Selbstverständlichkeit* or self-evident quality seemingly beyond interrogation.

Produced as a volume in the series "Understanding Modern European and Latin American Literature," Wallace Steadman Watson's readings of individual Fassbinder films do not achieve the degree of detail and depth possible in Silberman's book, but this is a limitation built into a project encompassing a formidable oeuvre of no less than 44 films. Next to Thomas Elsaesser's monograph, also released in 1996, Watson's book represents the most comprehensive text now available on Fassbinder's *Gesamtwerk*. He is to be commended for negotiating a coherent path through a formidable bibliography of interviews, letters, scholarly articles, as well as sensationalist detritus generated about the artist during his lifetime and since his death in 1982. One of the challenges encountered in sifting through this mass of material, whose sheer volume defies comparison with documentation available on any other contemporary German filmmaker, is the struggle to determine the veracity of sources, given the second-, even third-hand nature of many citations and the subjective nature of the biographical accounts provided by friends and foes of this extraordinary cinéaste. The same quotations and hyberbolic comments have recirculated throughout countless books and essays as a veritable hypostatisation of that Derridean assertion that all speech is inherently rumor. Wallace has made every possible effort to distinguish between hearsay and reliable documentation and has synthesized even the most recent scholarship, such as the Fall 1992 special issue on Fassbinder produced by the journal *New German Critique*, and Kaja Silverman's intriguing psychoanalytic readings of male subjectivity. The author apparantly also undertook extensive correspondence with Juliane Lorenz and with the late Liselotte Eder (Fassbinder's mother) of the RWF Foundation/Berlin, thereby making available to readers previously undocumented or unpublished information, including an excerpt from Fassbinder's legendary farewell letter to Armin Meier.

While Watson's book seems peppered with more than the usual apportionment of typographical errors, this has the ironic effect of highlighting the Herculean nature of the his project. Like Fassbinder's films themselves, which never achieve a fully seamless quality but rather self-consciously betray their origins, this compendium also discloses its palimpsestic character, doubtless the product of countless revisions, extensive and repeated searches for further bibliographical sources, painstaking reference checks, and stylistic reformulations. The organization of material enables an easy grasp of the manner in which the chronology of filmic production is coupled with the artist's personal and professional development. However, Watson essentially remains within preexisting conceptualizations of this material, namely, the tripartite division into male melodramas (early Fassbinder), "women's pictures" (middle period), and finally a more historically and nationally specific social criticism in the "late" Fassbinder. Overall, there are no major theoretical breakthroughs in the author's decoding of individual films nor in his assessment of the cinéaste's impact on the directions of contemporary German cinema. Both the enigmatic mixture of naïveté and complexity that characterizes the director's work, as well as the continuing need for historical distance, may partially explain why Fassbinder scholarship has only recently begun to exhibit a respectable degree of critical and theoretical sophistication.

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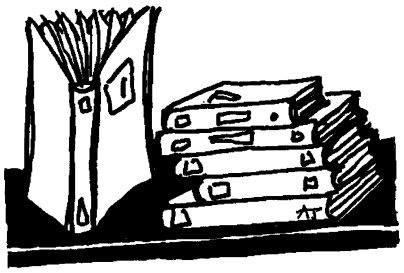

Guilty Pleasures

Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna

By Pamela Robertson. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996. $49.95 cloth; $15.95 paper.

In recent years, media scholars have directed increased critical scrutiny toward the practices of cultural production and reception associated with historically specific and demographically particularized audiences—the various special-interest spectatorial subcultures housed within the mass film and television audience. But if the rise of subculture studies has been a productive influence on the field, it has also been a polarizing one. Arguably, critical interest in subcultures has precipitated a major split in cultural studies, separating the cultural populists who celebrate subcultural pleasure as politically resistant from the cultural pessimists who identify subcultural pleasure with political cooption. In her rich and ambitious book, Pamela Robertson intervenes in this dispute by offering a compelling new feminist take on one of the practices that galvanized the creation of subculture theory: camp, the flamboyant and playful aesthetic sensibility associated with urban gay male subcultures. Robertson's study aims to delineate an alternative history of camp as a feminist practice. In the process, her work demonstrates how feminist analysis does not merely complement subcultural theory, but rather actively revises and complicates its premises.

The most intriguing and potentially most controversial aspect of Robertson's study lies in its attempt to expand the discussion of camp aesthetics and cultural practices to include women. As Robertson notes in her introductory chapter, the topic of women's participation in camp has been curiously neglected by analysts of the style: from Susan Sontag's landmark essay "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964) to more recent work on camp in relation to queer theory, camp has been understood as the exclusive province of gay men, with debate centering on the issue of whether its theatrical pleasures advance or retard gay political activism. For Robertson, what limits such analyses is the way they assume a "one-way traffic between gay men's and women's cultures" in which women figure prominently as objects for the exercise of a camp sensibility, but never as actual producers or consumers of camp (5). To counter such critical lapses, Robertson recovers an entire history of women as "camp subjects" in classical Hollywood film and contemporary mass culture. Robertson contends that this female-centered aestheticism parallels gay male camp in some respects—particularly in its parodic use of anachronistic images and its defiant theatricality—but that it is not identical to it. Indeed, one of the main achievements of *Guilty Pleasures* is the author's sensitivity to the differences between gay male camp and feminist camp—and to the specific historical circumstances in which these diverging practices become effective modes of cultural critique.

Robertson structures her history of women as camp performers and viewers around four case studies, with individual chapters devoted to Mae West, *Gold Diggers of 1933*, Joan Crawford's career in the 1950s, and Madonna. A concluding chapter examines the recycling of images already canonized as camp in contemporary feminist television, video, and film. Rather than delineating a continuous narrative of the development of feminist camp, the book's main chapters light on selected points in its history: the 1930s, the 1950s, and the 1980s. This apparent selectivity benefits Robertson's argument in several ways. For one thing, her choice of examples underscores how feminist camp, like its gay counterpart, offers strategies for cultural sustenance particularly well adapted to hostile times. By design, Robertson selects as representative examples of feminist camp figures and films associated with periods of backlash against feminism. In such contexts, Robertson argues, the camp aesthetic of creative anachronism takes on a new political urgency, whereby "anachronistic images . . . challenge dominant ideologies about women's roles in the economic sphere and . . . revitalize earlier (seemingly outmoded) feminist critiques" (19). A second advantage of the case-study structure of the book is that it enables Robertson to situate the development of feminist camp in an ongoing and sometimes antagonistic relation with the development of film and popular culture studies. In the course of the book, Robertson engages with several different schools of film interpretation in order to contextualize her representative examples of feminist camp. In her chapter on *Gold Diggers*, for example, Robertson uses the analysis of feminist camp to complicate both genre approaches to the film as musical and feminist critiques of Busby Berkeley's mise-en-scène; similarly, in her work on *Johnny Guitar*, she examines the auteurist criticism of Nicholas Ray and its limitations. In these examples as throughout the book, Robertson shows how camp as a feminist cultural practice problematizes one-dimensional approaches to film analysis.

Robertson's particular methodological argument lies with methods that involve an exclusively textual focus—a limitation that affects not only certain approaches to film criticism, but also the analysis of camp itself, a phenomenon that is often discussed in purely formal terms. In sharp contrast, Robertson's own method of analysis involves a remarkably deft combination of contextual and textual approaches, wherein she painstakingly

reconstructs the discourses of publicity and performance style that set the terms for the historical reception of these films by their contemporaneous viewers and then uses the evidence from that context to tease out readings of the feminist camp elements of her chosen examples. Such a procedure is, of course, by now familiar in film studies, insofar as it follows in the tradition of star study established by such scholars as Richard Dyer, Miriam Hansen, and the late Richard deCordova. Like the best of these previous studies, Robertson's work extends its commitment to historical analysis beyond the Hollywood studio system and its organs of publicity to encompass the wider concerns of American social and cultural history. Particularly exemplary in this regard is the chapter on *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Here, Robertson draws upon recent work in women's history to delineate the emergence of the "gold digger"—the figure who functions as the presiding spirit of feminist camp, "its original personification, its defining voice" (58). In Robertson's analysis, the gold digger stereotype must be understood as a cynical and conservative 1920s recoding of earlier social discourse about prostitution, wherein the Progressive Era emphasis on material need as the structural cause of prostitution gives way to an explanation that focuses on the personal greed of the gold digger. In a dazzling and convincing reading of the film, Robertson shows how the feminist camp elements of theatrical performance and parodic anachronism that structure the narrative of *Gold Diggers* might have enabled contemporaneous viewers to recover the original materialist explanation for prostitution that the stereotype of the gold digger elsewhere works to occlude. A similar commitment to contextualize feminist camp practice in relation to developments in social history runs throughout the book: Robertson reads Mae West's star persona in relation to the cross-class and cross-racial identifications embodied in the burlesque and minstrel traditions, Joan Crawford's camp performance in *Johnny Guitar* in relation to butch-femme role playing and 1950s moral panics over homosexuality, and Madonna's celebrity in relation to the rise of postmodernism and queer identity politics.

In reconceiving camp as a feminist cultural practice with its own unique performance traditions drawn from burlesque and its own distinctive relation to the lives of female spectators, Robertson thus goes far beyond the compensatory gesture of establishing an alternative canon of female camp performers. To be sure, the revisionist impulse in her argument aligns it with a certain long-standing feminist discontent with subculture theory concerning its unexamined and often unacknowledged bias toward male experience. But what is at stake for Robertson is, I think, something more. To reconceptualize camp as a feminist practice is not simply to consider female camp a subcultural mode of expression equivalent to gay male camp; it is also to argue that women's culture is as central to the debates over modernity and mass culture as gay male camp itself. In effect, Robertson wants us to entertain the possibility that the popular aestheticism voiced through the figures of the burlesque queen, the gold digger, the career woman, and the material girl might provide us with positive models for thinking beyond the "great divide" between art and entertainment in a way that would avoid both the cultural elitism often associated with camp and the unreflective eclecticism that characterizes postmodern pastiche. For Robertson, feminist camp provides such a model through the dialectical mode of reception it invites from women, one in which their pleasure is never unqualified but always negotiated, always tempered by a guilty consciousness of ideological manipulation, such that, as Robertson puts it, "the female spectator laughs at and plays with her own image . . . without losing sight of the real power that image has over her" (117). Equally important, feminist camp also becomes exemplary for Robertson in the flexible strategies of interpretation it demands. In her work, the analysis of camp as a feminist practice becomes an occasion for feminist film theory to enter into dialogue with other methods, such that each of her examples creates new and productive critical alignments among feminism, queer theory, materialist analysis, and African-American cultural studies. *Guilty Pleasures* offers readers an intellectual experience that is as serious and as playful as feminist camp itself.

■ Marianne Conroy teaches film and cultural studies at the University of Maryland.

History by Hollywood

The Use and Abuse of the American Past

By Robert Brent Toplin. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996. $36.95 cloth; $16.95 paper.

Since the permanent waves of the Babylonian slave girls, Hollywood has notoriously got its history wrong, and its most trenchant critics have been not the colonels protesting that the uniforms are wrong, but the academic historians who have charged it with distorting or trivializing historical truth through ignorance or vulgarity. In such critiques, the concept of historical accuracy acquires a status akin to that of a literary work adapted for the movies, and an excessive preoccupation

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with accuracy produces accounts as turgidly wrong-headed as those interminable discussions of whether movie adapations of literary works are sufficiently "faithful" to their sources. Such questions fundamentally misunderstand the nature of Hollywood's practices of adaptation, which are not so much concerned with adapting a pre-existing text for the screen as with adapting a work to Hollywood's pre-existing set of representational, commercial, and ideological conventions.

This process of adaptation applies as much to historical material as to literary works. When Frank Nugent was writing *Fort Apache*, John Ford gave him "a list of about 50 books to read—memoirs, novels, anything about the period. Later he sent me down into the Old Apache country to nose around, get the smell and feel of the land. When I got back, Ford asked if I thought I had enough research. I said yes. 'Good,' he said. 'Now just forget everything you've read and we'll start writing a movie.'" The attitude to history exemplified by Ford's comment had been the subject of a Photoplay Appreciation Movement study guide to the 1936 version of *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, which asked high-school students to discuss whether, in rearranging historical events to suit the requirements of narrative and genre, movies ought to be permitted "a cinematographic license that corresponds to the traditional poetic license."

And there, at what is assumed to be a clearly delineated boundary between fact and fiction, drama and documentary, evidence and speculation, the question has largely stuck, rephrased perhaps but not reformulated by recent discussions of "postmodern history." By way of an alternative, we might differentiate between historical authenticity, which is a matter of getting the uniforms right, historical accuracy, which might be about whether the real Clyde Barrow was impotent or not, and, for want of a better term, historical truth, which might be about the FBI's actual relationship to the civil rights movement. Despite the anecdotal denunciations, most Hollywood historicals are pretty good about the details because their authenticity serves to underpin their claim to truth: as much the case for *All the President's Men*'s meticulous recreation of the *Washington Post* offices as for Cecil B. deMille's monumental research department on *The Ten Commandments*. Authenticity is a production value, visible as spectacle on the screen. On the other hand, accuracy—the matter of whether Lord Gordon ever met the Mahdi or Bob Woodward ever told Deep Throat to "cut out the chickenshit"—is the first casualty of the movies' dramatic requirement to have Heston confront Olivier, or Redford assert his star persona. Historical truth, like myth, is for the winners to negotiate. In *Buffalo Bill and the Indians: or, Sitting Bull's History Lesson*, Annie Oakley (Geraldine Chaplin) demands to know why Buffalo Bill Cody (Paul Newman) will not let Sitting Bull reenact the McLaren massacre. "He wanted to show the truth to the people," she tells him. "Why can't you accept that just once?" "Because," he replies, "I got a better sense of history than that."

Robert Brent Toplin's *History by Hollywood* makes a modest contribution to the discussion of how much historical slack "is acceptable in the rope of creative liberty" (2) through eight case studies, all of films nominated for the Best Picture Academy Award. What else unites them is somewhat less clear: seven of them were produced since 1967, the other, *Sergeant York*, in 1941, under a different system of production; three—*Missing*, *All the President's Men*, and *Norma Rae*—deal with events that occurred in the decade prior to the movie's production, while the other five describe events that took place twenty or more years in the past. The book offers no generic definition of the historical film, so the reader is left to draw his or her own connections. It is, for example, a little surprising that Toplin should choose not to draw attention to the parallels between *Sergeant York* and *Patton*, both biographical pictures set in one war and produced in another, both requiring the cooperation of the U.S. Army and of the actual protagonist or his family, and both denounced as pro-war propaganda on their release. In several senses, the essay on *Sergeant York* would seem to belong to a different project from the rest of the book.

The text might have benefitted from more assertive editorial intervention to eliminate some of its repetition, both at the descriptive level and, more structurally, in the similarities between chapters, which (with the exception of the chapter on *Sergeant York*) follow the same pattern, describing the criticisms of the film's alleged historical inaccuracies, its producers' defences, and Toplin's "balanced" verdict on whether his chosen cinematic historians have produced "responsible portrayals of historical events" (225). Toplin's conservative adherence to this formula deprives him of the opportunity to address other, potentially more complex or dispersed questions of historical representation. His judgmental conclusion that Oliver Stone "should have promoted" *JFK* "as a work of fiction" (78) fails to engage with the more intricate and explosive issues raised by Stone's promiscuous coupling of fact and paranoiac mythology. His account of *Patton* celebrates the movie's achievement in "carefully avoid[ing] making a final judgment about its enigmatic subject" (227), rather than investigating the extent to which this "integrity" was actually a matter of commercial necessity. The interesting thing about *Missing* is surely not whether it is "an assault on the integrity of the U.S. government, the Foreign Service and the military" (124)—self-evidently it is—nor whether that assault is justified by the facts in the murder of Charles Horman, but why MCA believed that such a movie could circulate profitably and to

critical esteem in movie theaters in the U.S. and the rest of the world in 1982. But broader-ranging examinations of the movies' nostalgic construction of recent American history as a Utopia lost to the Dark Side in Dealey Plaza must await a work more wide-ranging in its sense of where Hollywood's history can be found, and less conservatively attached to an agenda of accuracy.

■ Richard Maltby is Head of Screen Studies at the Flinders University of South Australia.

Hollywood's America

Social and Political Themes in Motion Pictures

By Stephen Powers, David J. Rothman, and Stanley Rothman. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996. $75.00 cloth; $22.95 paper.

This little book is not without ambition. It claims to combine "the most extensive systematic content analysis ever completed of social and political themes in motion pictures from 1946 to the present, with the most detailed study ever conducted of the political views and personalities of a random sample of leaders in the motion picture industry"(xv). As an added bonus, the authors throw in a free critique of "the poststructuralist theories that currently dominate academic film criticism." Other than providing ammunition for the next populist denunciation of movie liberalism, what *Hollywood's America* actually achieves is a demonstration of the limited utility of content analysis as a research tool in the study of fiction.

Content analysis is a broad and shallow methodology. It can map shifts in Hollywood's demographics and in some patterns of representation—of the military, of business, of religion and the supernatural, for example. If the sample is large enough, it can document the prevalence of different thematic concerns or different versions of heroism at different periods, or indicate, as this book does, the extent to which the pursuit of romance has ceased to be the predominant goal of Hollywood's women characters. Evidence of this kind is certainly grist to the mill of ideological analysis. But the quantitative strengths of content analysis are offset by its limitations. To turn movie plots or characters into statistics, it can ask only the simplest questions of them.

To survey Hollywood's output since 1946, the authors analyzed the content of 159 movies. That amounts to about three-and-a-half movies a year, rather fewer than you might expect to encounter in a film history survey text covering the period. Their claim to methodological superiority over the "anecdotal" practices of "the majority of American film theorists" (218) lies in the empirically verifiable nature of their data. While the interpretations of others are merely subjective, their evidence has been subjected to standard statistical procedures to verify its intersubjective reliability. When they discuss individual films for "illustrative" purposes, their approach is, they assert, "quite straightforward. We make little effort to go beyond the obvious in describing the films so used" (8).

Empirically verifiable and straightforward it may be, but subtle it's not. There seems to be no place in this analytical scheme for generic convention or for the operations of so fundamental a structuring principle of Hollywood cinema as the star system. As for whether the authors' descriptions go beyond—or even achieve—the obvious, there is at least room for debate among those who believe in a value-free descriptive language: in the version of *Rear Window* their coders viewed, the police, although minor characters, "perform well, providing critical support to the characters, who would have come to a bad end without their assistance" (109). In the *Star Wars* trilogy, Princess Leia has a "non-traditional occupation" as "an important military leader who engages in combat, repairs spaceships, participates in war strategy meetings, and gives orders . . . her romance with Han Solo is portrayed as an annoyance and an obstacle to her more important responsibilities" (161). *Beetlejuice* "presents a completely bizarre view of the afterlife" (135).

The survey is concerned with character, and a movie's themes are identified through the motivation and behaviour of its characters. Of the 4,000 characters in its movie sample, three-quarters were sidelined as being "neutral": only there to provide information to move the plot along, and therefore only of demographic interest. The remaining characters–slightly more than six per movie–were classified as either positive ("a good person"), negative ("a bad person"), or mixed ("characters who perform both good and bad acts in the movie or who change from good to bad or vice versa") (262). Unless the coders achieved a 70 percent level of agreement, the material was "discarded" (6). This reliability level may ensure that the results are "replicable using standard public methods," but it also eliminates elements that are either ambiguous or too complex to submit to the simplicities of the coding schema. To do them justice, the authors concede the limitations of their methodology for analyzing thematic material: "Obtaining high reliability levels for the thematic analysis proved more difficult [than for character analysis] because the identification of themes and messages in the movies is more subjective than the character analysis, which is based largely on demographic characteristics of individuals" (261). But not

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surprisingly, the authors draw little attention to this important methodological discovery that intersubjectively reliable content analysis is an unreliable instrument in this area of research. You have to read the footnotes to find the admission that "our coding scheme is too simple . . . unfortunately, our categories do not permit a more complex differentiation if we are to achieve reasonably high levels of agreement among coders. Thus, more complex distinctions have inevitably to be discussed anecdotally" (13)—this despite the negative coding attached to the term "anecdotal" in this text.

None of these limitations need rule out the contributions that content analysis can make to film studies, but they do circumscribe them. Some of the authors' analytical practices are, however, vulnerable to more fundamental objection. They make no attempt to conceal their hostility to what they identify as the prevailing methodology of film studies. If the "Hollywood elite" are, in their account, alienated collectivist liberals, the poverty-stricken authors of film theory are ultra-leftists who "transform political questions into questions of representation, colonizing politics in terms of poststructuralist theory" (238). It is doubtless always valuable to have the intellectual premises of a discipline interrogated from outside its confines, and clearly there is some validity to the suggestion that some academic film criticism, like some literary and fine art criticism, supports large statements about psychology and culture on nothing more substantial than anecdotal readings and limited examples (230). But if the poststructuralist villains of this critique have dissolved the world into representation, the authors of *Hollywood's America* treat the movies as if they were events in the real world.

Consider, for example, the obtuse assumptions underlying this book's proposition that statistics about the frequency of crimes in movies can be compared to statistics about the frequency of crimes in society. To achieve the comparison, movies must be reduced to their plot lines and examined in terms of whether their characters are good or bad. Characters must be ascribed motivations according to their plot functions, and both character and motivation must be extracted from the plot for evaluation. These motivations and evaluations must then be compared to their real-world equivalents, as if the movies' representation of fictional melodrama could be compared with opinion polls surveying public attitudes to, for example, the police and the military. The phenomenon of fiction simply evaporates in this process.

Underlying the book's methodological conflict with film studies is an ideological one; in this case, at least, methodology is ideology. The content analysis is an incidental part of a larger project in which this book participates: an account of elites in American society, which argues that "postindustrial cultural elites are often in ideological conflict with the older leadership groups on a wide range of issues. . . . Hollywood films are the product of a highly educated, affluent, and powerful leadership group that is vying for influence in America with other more traditional leadership groups [and seeking] to persuade Americans to create the kind of society that they regard as just and/or good" (2-3).

The basis for this claim lies in Stanley Rothman's theory of elite groups, and the correlation of the content analysis with data from a 1982 questionnaire, in which 96 Hollywood writers, producers, and directors agreed or disagreed with 17 statements about political and social issues. From this evidence the authors deduce that Hollywood's elite are ideological children of the 1960s, while their content analysis "establishes that the movies of this creative elite articulate these new attitudes, which stand in marked contrast to those of the majority of the American public (and traditional elite groups) on a wide variety of issues . . . the totality of their work suggests a more or less coherent ideology. That ideology is generally left-leaning and highly critical of traditional features of American society" (3, 5). While a chapter on industry history makes some uncontentious points about the rise of independent production and the effects of specialization within conglomerate structures giving filmmakers "relative autonomy" (35)—their phrase, not Althusser's—the way in which this elite transmits this ideology in these films is not documented in any detail. Rather, the correlation of the two sets of data is assumed, and assumed to demonstrate a causal relationship that demonstrates the validity of the authors' theories of elite leadership.

A work less hostile in its treatment of alternative approaches might deserve gentler treatment of its own methodological flaws. But the authors have nothing to say about the intricacy, complexity, and delicacy of the relationship between cultural objects and their audiences. Instead, their argument depends on reducing movies to a level so obvious as to defy disagreement: "most members of most audiences will agree on the very basic items for which we code. They can, for example, determine if

a woman character is a housewife or a professional, a criminal or a law-abiding citizen, a person who relies on force to gain her ends or who uses persuasion. By and large they can even tell the good guys from the bad guys" (10). Whether ironically intended or not, the "even" is significant, because it marks the limit of their enquiry—at the point at which ideological analysis begins to become sufficiently complex, meaningful, and rewarding as to be worth undertaking. Of course audiences can tell the good guys from the bad guys. If they can't the movie in question is failing to conform to Hollywood's narrative norms which the authors, despite having watched at least 159 movies, seem not to have noticed.

■ Richard Maltby is the author of *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* and *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus.*

Japanese Cinema

The Essential Handbook

By Thomas Weisser and Yuko Mihara Weisser. Miami: Vital Books, 1996. $19.95.

The Japanese Filmography

A Complete Reference to 209 Filmmakers and the over 1250 Films Released in the United States, 1900 through 1994

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Nowhere are the limitations and arbitrariness of the academic film canon more acute than in the case of Japanese cinema. A national cinema whose output for several decades surpassed that of Hollywood is customarily reduced in most college film courses to the standard roll call of Ozu, Mizoguchi, and Kurosawa. Oshima typically stands in for all of Japanese cinema since 1960 (perhaps with a little crowd-pleasing Itami thrown in toward the end when the students are about to fill out course evaluations). This tendency is due partly to the fact these directors continue to reward scholarly interest, partly to the sociology of academic conventionalism, and partly—perhaps primarily—to logistical constraints. Most prewar Japanese films are lost, and most of what has survived is not available on video or film. Literally fewer than ten Japanese films from before 1940 are available in this country. As for postwar Japanese films, although roughly 200 feature films have been released in recent years on film or video in the U. S. (many now out-of-print), nearly 15,000 others remain unavailable. Excluding animation, only one Japanese film in 75 ever makes it to this country. Critically acclaimed films fare a bit better, but that is not saying much: of the 660 films selected in *Kinema Jumpo*'s annual top ten lists between 1926 and 1994 (the ranking was not made in two war years), only 87, or 13 percent, are available on film or video.

Given this sorry state of affairs, survey histories and reference books become particularly important for the glimpses they reveal of the broader scope of Japanese cinema. Two new reference works contribute significantly towards a wider perspective. Both come from the film-buff end of the scholarly spectrum, which is at once both the source of their strength—they illuminate an enormous popular cinema eclipsed by the art films and period pieces showcased at film festivals and released in the West—and the source of some notable flaws.

Japanese Cinema: The Essential Handbook is a real eye-opener. Self-published by a Miami-based connoisseur of "trash" cinema (mainly low-budget horror, sci-fi, and exploitation films from decades past) and his Japanese wife, the book is the first encyclopedic resource specializing on distinctly popular Japanese film from the mid-1950s to today. The large majority of the films discussed are completely unknown in this country. David Desser touches on a few of the films in *Eros Plus Massacre*, his impressive survey of the Japanese New Wave of the 60s, but there is not much overlap; whereas Desser emphasized the more "serious" forms of radical and modernist cinema coming primarily out of the Shochiku Studio, Thomas and Yuko Mihara Weisser focus on more commercial sensational and lowbrow popular fare of the sort associated with the Nikkatsu studio (and they cover a longer duration). Their book is probably most valuable as a documentation of the elaborately mysogynistic "pinku geku" (pink films) and "ero-gro" (erotic grotesque S/M films) that now represent over half of the industry's output. No other reference work to date has provided information on titles like *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* (Atsushi Yamatoya, 1967); *Joys of Torture* (an eight-film series, Teruo Ishii, 1968-73); *Abnormal Passion Case: Razor* (Giichi Nishihara, 1977); *Angel Guts* (a seven-film series, 1978-95); and *Entrails of a Virgin* (Kazuo Komizu, 1988). Whatever one's attitude about such films, they are central to a fuller understanding of Japanese cinema and culture. The book serves as a perfect filmographic companion to Ian Buruma's 1984 study *Behind the Mask: On Sexual Demons, Sacred Mothers, Transvestites, Gangsters, Drifters and Other Japanese Cultural Heroes.*

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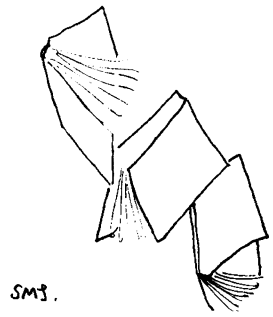

Only about a third of the films covered in *Japanese Cinema: The Essential Handbook* are erotic spectacles. Also treated are samurai films, ghost stories, monster movies, yakuza and cop thrillers, comedies, and even quite a few of the high art films with which we are familiar. Illustrated with over 200 publicity stills, the book contains informative entries on roughly 250 feature films and 50 film series constituting 450 more feature-length theatrical releases. Entries, organized alphabetically by title, provide credits for directors and actors, plot synopses, and brief critical evaluations and contextualizations regarding genre conventions, production histories, and artists' careers.

The authors make it clear that they are not attempting a comprehensive catalogue of Japanese releases. However, the work would benefit from a fuller account of its film-selection process, perhaps with a sketch of what was left out. This would give readers a clearer sense of whether the book's sample is indeed representative of the overall topography of contemporary popular cinema in Japan. Film scholars will be disappointed to find that the book lacks any real bibliography, a particularly unfortunate omission given that the Japanese and fan-oriented periodicals the authors consulted are not known to most academics.

The Japanese Filmography is another reference listing hundreds of obscure Japanese films, in addition to more familiar titles. Alphabetical entries, over 1,250 in all, provide very extensive cast and production-personnel credits, along with information on production and distribution companies, precise release dates, MPAA ratings, film formats, and running times. Although this information is considerably more detailed than that given in *Japanese Cinema: The Essential Handbook*, *The Japanese Filmography* differs in the key respect that it offers no plot synopses or critical contextualizations. Its narrower factual focus greatly limits the filmography's potential as a resource for learning about the nature of Japanese cinema and culture, beyond what one can glean from film titles. The exhaustive credit and production information is also hampered by the fact that no indexes of names or companies is provided (although biographical entries on over 200 actors and directors do list their films).

While it deserves a great deal of credit as the largest yet English-language listing of Japanese films, the selection of entries appears rather idiosyncratic in its design. It includes all the films presently available in this country on video, laserdisc, or film; films exhibited in festivals or retrospectives; films imported for exhibition in foreign-language theaters catering to Japanese immigrants in the U.S.; international coproductions and American films shot and partly financed in Japan; and a limited selection of films never released in the United States (primarily non-imported works by famous directors such as Ozu and Mizoguchi, but also works by lesser-known directors). Presumably, this compilation represents all that can be gathered from English-language sources. The author should have made this much clearer in order to justify the filmography's almost exclusive focus on films released the U. S. and, inversely, to explain why coverage of never-imported Japanese films is so fragmentary and seemingly random.

The author indicates that, in addition to material garnered from other reference resources and scholarly books, the filmography draws heavily from newspaper clippings, exhibitor booklets, film festival catalogues, magazine articles, etc., held by the Academy library and a collector named Moto Yokoyama. If each entry cited the specific evidence-source used, *The Japanese Filmography* would be a much richer tool for research into exhibition history. The bulk of titles contained in the filmography appear to be films imported in the 60s and early 70s for Japanese-language movie theaters in the "Little Tokyo" neighborhoods of American cities. Unfortunately, without more explicit information, it is difficult to know for sure whether any given film was shown in these specialized theaters, or in art houses, in a festival or retrospective, or (in the case of sci-fi movies) in "ordinary" theater or on TV.

An appendix provides complete information on Japanese Academy Awards and *Kinema Jumpo* top-ten lists. Another appendix on Japanese Home Market Statistics is particularly helpful, albeit inconsistent with the book's focus on the U.S. market. It presents statistical data on such things as the number of movie theaters in Japan for each year from 1959 to 1992 (broken down by those showing only domestic films, those showing imports, and those showing both); the number of features released in Japan for each year from 1946 to 1992 (broken down by independents, majors, and imports); yearly film revenues (domestic versus imported films); theater attendance figures; box-office takes; average ticket prices; and television saturation. However, the sources from which this data is derived are not cited—an astonishing and utterly inexcusable omission for a reference book of this sort.

Reading these works involves a masochistic pleasure-pain with which film scholars are all too familiar: it

is both thrilling and frustrating to learn about hundreds upon hundreds of obscure films that are impossible to see outside Japan, or even within. In guiding our attention beyond the canon, both books are valuable, if imperfect, tools for research into Japanese cinema.

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Barnard, Timothy, and Peter Rist, eds. *South American Cinema: A Critical Filmography, 1915-1994*. New York: Garland, 1996. $64.00. In this collection of highly synthetic essays on individual films made in the Southern Hemisphere, Canadian Tim Barnard and British-born Peter Rist, with the assistance of 19 additional contributors from across the Americas, reconfigure the "genre" of filmography to constitute an "imaginary cinematheque" that includes several "treasures [that] cannot be seen on celluloid." This inclusion of long-lost works suggests that the historical impulse is as important as the critical one in this ambitious, original, and eminently readable, if idiosyncratic, reference work. Emphasis lies on recent production: 108 out of 139 titles were produced after 1955. With 49 titles, the Brazilian selection is the largest, followed by Argentina (33 titles), Venezuela (13 titles), Chile and Colombia (11 titles each), Peru (10 titles), Bolivia (8 titles), and Ecuador and Paraguay (2 titles each). Both commercial and oppositional works are included, the occasional documentary or animated feature alongside the predominantly fictional majority, the occasional silent alongside a majority of "talkies," the occasional Super-8 production alongside a majority of works shot in 35 millimeter. The volume is organized alphabetically by country and chronologically within each section. Most of the essays situate the film under discussion in its specific production context, within its director's career trajectory, and in terms of national events as well as national film history. Most comment perceptively on cinematic style; some incorporate comments from the director.

JULIANNE BURTON-CARVAJAL

Palmer, Bill, Karen Palmer, and Ric Meyers, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Martial Arts Movies*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1995. $69.95. As a result of developing interest in Hong Kong Cinema and the migration of directors such as John Woo and Ringo Lam to Hollywood, reference works providing reliable information for investigating historical and contemporary films are urgently needed. Unfortunately, this over-priced book is a huge disappointment. The editors list some 3,281 films from Hong Kong, America, and Japan. They have decided to cover a very broad field according to what they understand as martial arts films. Diligent readers may excavate some interesting information to conduct further investigations from the index alone—assuming it is correct. But the flawed construction and execution of this book raise grave doubts. It is full of numerous errors, omissions, and dubious methodology. Indeed, the editors do not appear to have any logical methodology whatsoever. Although they attempt an over-comprehensive listing of martial arts movies, they include many films which have no connection with the genre whatsoever. Peculiar entries include Melville's *Le Samourai*, the boxing movie *Diggstown*, *Riverbend*, and the classic Kurosawa films such as *Rashomon*, *Throne of Blood*, *Red Reard*, *Ran*, and *The Shadow Warrior*. Frank Sinatra's "karate" prowess in *The Manchurian Candidate* leads to that film's inclusion as well. And readers will be surprised to learn that John Woo is a Korean immigrant (21) who directed *Hard Boiled* in 1983 (405) as well as *Once a Thief 2* (257), for instance, and that Leslie Cheung (according to the *Aces Go Places* synopsis) is female. Reader beware—approach with caution!

TONY WILLIAMS

Shindler, Colin. *Hollywood in Crisis: Cinema and American Society 1929-1939*. London: Routledge, 1996. $75.00 cloth; $24.99 paper. In the opening of this latest entry in Routledge's Cinema and Society series, Colin Shindler explains that "the basic research for this book was originally conducted as part of a doctoral thesis awarded by the University of Cambridge in 1974" (x). The history of the project, then, is precisely its major problem; *Hollywood in Crisis* reads like a book that might have been written 25 years ago, before the work of Sklar, Jowett, Balio, and others helped turn film history into a serious discipline that posed important methodological questions about the relations between the cinema and other institutions. Shindler attempts to construct a "context" for Depression-era films, and then looks for "reflections" of that context in the films themselves. He tells his history of the 1930s through a scattershot of citations from materials from the period (trade magazines and anti-Roosevelt tracts, for example), but never explains how this sheds light on the De-

pression. More significantly for contemporary scholars, Shindler never questions his main assumption, that films are simply reflective of "real" activities, people, and events. There are good things in Shindler's book: for instance, the documentary evidence of the struggle between the Hays Office and MGM over the 1933 film *Gabriel over the White House*. But because Shindler assumes that history can be unproblematically interpreted through films and never connects his project to contemporary issues in the writing of film history, his book, finally, does little to increase our understanding of Hollywood's handling of the Depression.

ERIC SMOODIN

Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, *More Things Than Are Dreamt Of.* New York: Limelight, 1994. $20; and *The Vampire Film: From Nosferatu to Bram Stoker's Dracula*, rev. ed. New York: Limelight, 1993. $20. Over the past few years several studies of the horror film have appeared which concentrate on particular aspects of the genre. Whether they deal with 30s or 80s gender representations or "skin shows," such works are now far removed from the type of comprehensive surveys written by Carlos Clarens and Ivan Butler over 20 years ago. Although not as theoretical and culturally orientated as most contemporary works tend to be, these two books by Silver and Ursini (non-academics who work in film production) are valuable in drawing our attention back to the broader canvas. The authors began *More Things Than Are Dreamt Of* soon after the 1973 edition of *The Vampire Film*. It follows a very traditional path of literary adaptation, with chapters dealing with cinematic versions of the work of Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur Machen, R.L. Stevenson, Henry James, M.R. James, and Stephen King. Although most of the initial research still dominates the book, the authors have updated the material; thus they compare Corman's *The Haunted Palace* (1964) to recent examples such as *Reanimator* (1985) and *The Resurrection* (1992). The second edition of *The Vampire Film* follows the "critical survey" and thematically orientated approach of the first edition by adding new material from generally neglected areas of American exploitation, Spanish, and Mexican sources. As in the first edition, the writers explore the various historical, literary, and cinematic representations dealing with the vampire legend. Two new chapters cover recent depictions of Carmilla Karnstein, Elizabeth Barthory, and other sisters, as well as contemporary examples from film and television. The book concludes with a newly revised filmography and bibliography. Like *More Things,* the authors employ a fairly basic treatment emphasizing key elements in the plot as well as notable features of cinematography. But the main advantage lies in the descriptions and listings of several neglected works such as the satirical *Innocent Blood* (1992) and the short-lived 1991 new television version of "Dark Shadows," which certainly need further examination.

T. W.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION, 9/15/97

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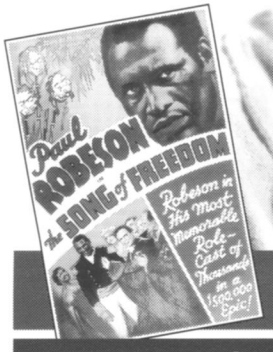

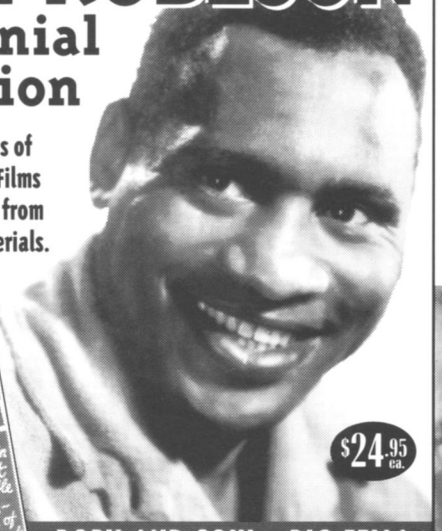

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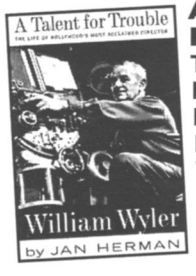

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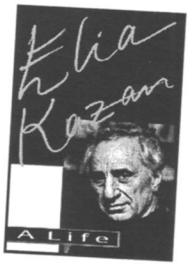

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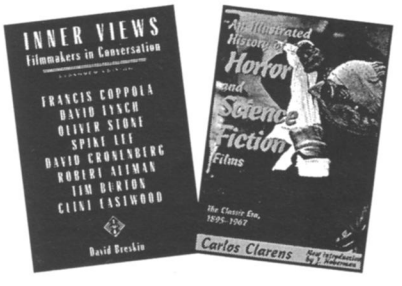

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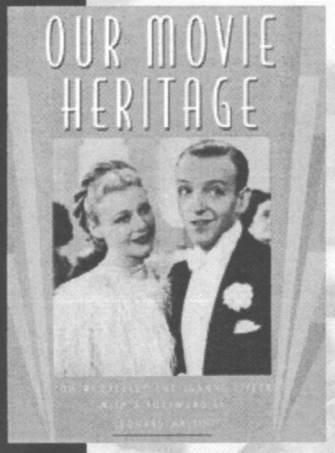

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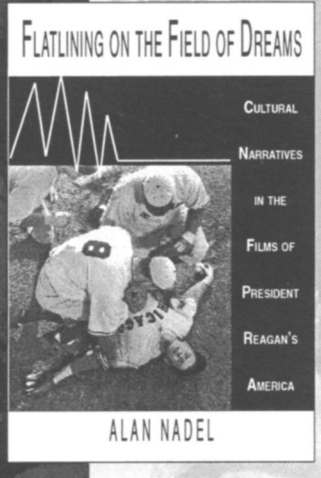

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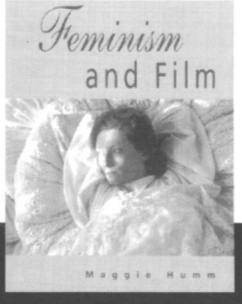

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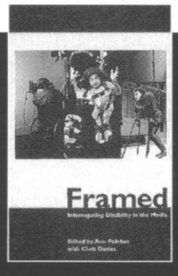

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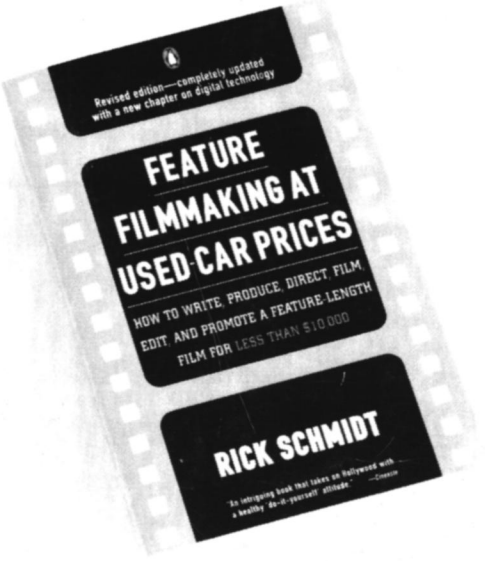

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